



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 235 William St., N. Y.

No. 74.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL'S DESPERATE STRATEGY

OR
THE MYSTERY OF THE CLIFF



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
"BUFFALO BILL"

THERE CAME A WILD, TERRIBLE WAR-CRY FROM THE AIR, AS BUFFALO BILL'S REPEATING RIFLE SENT DEATH FROM HIS AMBUSH, IN THE PINE TREE.



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No. 74.

NEW YORK, October 11, 1902.

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Buffalo Bill's Desperate Strategy;

OR,

THE MYSTERY OF THE CLIFF.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

FOUR OF A KIND.

"Pards, Buffalo Bill ain't so smart as he thinks he is. See thar!"

The speaker was one of four men in an Overland stage coach, on its run east from the mountain mining camps.

They were a hard-looking four, as faces go—bearded, long-haired, and roughly dressed. They were, apparently, securely bound, hands and feet, and linked together with raw-hide lariats.

They were prisoners, on their way to be delivered up at the fort. They had boarded the coach to hold it up, on the way, kill the driver, and rob it of its treasure in golden freight; but ere they could carry out their purpose, the coach had been halted, suddenly, and there in the trail was Buffalo Bill, the great scout, and two comrades.

His comrades were boys in years, for they were

under twenty, and yet bold, fearless fellows, who would follow Buffalo Bill anywhere.

They were young Texans who had come to the great Northwest on a secret mission—a hunt for the father of one of the youths, who had not been heard of for several years, but had been in that mining country, and there known as the Midnight Mail Rider of the Mines.

Disappearing suddenly, many believed that he had run off with the valuable mail he carried on that run; others said they were sure he had been killed; the majority of the miners knew not what to think.

He always rode by night, took different trails, and had two horses and two dogs, one of each going with him on each ride.

His horse had come into camp, but the dog had not, and so a mystery hung over the fate of the Night Mail Rider.

His son, Harold Hart, chief of cowboys on a Texas ranch, had made up his mind to find his father, and

the son of the wealthy ranchero, a youth of his own age, and Leonard Ashley by name, had accompanied him.

Aided by Buffalo Bill, who made them his boy pards, his sure-shots, as he called them, and also by Buck Dawson, the stage driver, who had been the Mail Rider's friend, and still had his two horses and dog in keeping, the youth in search of the father had solved the mystery of his parent's fate.

They had found his skeleton form in a cavern, the bones of his faithful dog near him, also his rifle and the missing mail bags.

The latter had been robbed, and the dying man had written with pencil, on the envelopes of open letters, the story of the attack upon him and named those who had been his murderers.

With this information the youth who had to mourn his parent's fate vowed vengeance against his father's slayers, and his comrade, Leonard Ashley, and Buffalo Bill were to be his allies in the work of bringing the guilty ones to justice.

With this determination Buffalo Bill and his Texan team had gone on to the fort, expecting to find there two of the criminals, whom they had sent on in the coach under guard of the driver, Buck Dawson.

But they were grievously disappointed, as the reader of these pages will see.

Two of the men whose names were on the list, written by the Mail Rider when he was dying in the cavern, were now of the four who were bound and seated in the stage coach.

The one who had uttered the words which open this story was their leader, Doc Driggs, a professed miner, but secretly an outlaw.

As he spoke, with a slight effort he drew one hand out of the lariat thongs that bound them, then the other.

"See there?" he said, and he held up his freed hands.

The others could hardly resist a shout of triumph, but he quickly placed his hand upon his lips, in token of silence, and said, in a whisper: "That is what it is to be blessed with small hands and feet, and not with such paddles as you fellows has.

"Buffalo Bill thought he tied me tight, for he hopes ter see me hanged, but I ain't dead yet, as he'll find out.

"Now I must free you fellers; then we'll be ready ter act, for thar's a man up on that box ter kill."

"But, we hain't got no weapons," whispered the three bound outlaws.

"I ain't the fool you and Buffalo Bill took me for. See here!"

He thrust one of his freed hands into a pocket in the leg of his pants, and drew out a small pistol, but a deadly one, for it carried a large ball.

"They didn't find this gun, and now it will come in mighty well.

"But, first, I wants ter set you fellers free, and you bet we'll hold up Buck Dawson mighty quick and git his boodle, too.

"Then I has something ter say to you, men," and the man begun to unbind the lariats which secured his feet.

CHAPTER II.

A BOLD BLUFF.

The outlaw leader worked diligently at his bonds, while, all unconscious of the dangerous work going on in his coach, Buck Dawson drove on his way, now whistling, now singing in a fine voice some lines of a Wild West ballad.

Buck Dawson was in a good humor. He daily and nightly risked his life in driving the dangerous trails, but now he felt that he had those whom he most feared safe in his clutches, and did not doubt that Colonel Ramsey, at the fort, would make short work of them as an example to other outlaws and renegades.

That they could free themselves of their bonds he had not the remotest idea.

So on he drove, until the way led into a heavily-timbered valley. There the horses were halted, in a stream that crossed the trail, to revive themselves with a drink of luscious water.

Seated upon his box, patiently waiting for his horses to get their fill, Buck was startled by the words from within the coach:

"Say, Buck, don't you want to make big money?"

"Yes," he drawled out. "How can it be did?"

"By setting us free."

"Not much!"

"We can raise a big sum between us, and if you will let us go it's yours."

"You is treeing ther wrong coon, Doc Driggs, if yer thinks you can buy me."

"Don't you want money?"

"Yes, but I don't want ter steal it, or git it by doing a mean act."

"You is too particular."

"Maybe I is, but I goes by my conscience in what I does."

"What is that?"

"Something you hasn't got, so it can't be explained to you."

"I hain't rich, and yet I hain't going to take a dollar of any man's money I don't git honest."

"Sunday school talk."

"Yes, I l'arned it from my mother when I were a kid, and I ain't ever done nothing to disgrace her name, and I hopes ter tell her so yet afore she dies, or I'm laying up money year by year, but coming honest by it."

"You're a fool."

"Maybe; but I ain't a murdering outlaw as well."

"Well, I ain't forgot that one time you took my part when I was gitting worsted, and saved me from passing in my chips."

"I did what I would for any man in trouble."

"It's because of that I wish ter help yer."

"Don't need any help, thank yer, Doc."

"I means to save your life."

"I ain't in any danger jist now."

"I wanted ter give yer big money ter let us go."

"Don't want it."

"You refused, and so yer won't let me help yer; you'll have to take the consequences."

"I allus does take the consequences of my actions, Doc; every man does."

"But, I'll drive on now."

"Hold! Hands up or you're a dead man!"

Buck Dawson looked around to behold the outlaw leader's body half out of the coach window.

Holding on by one hand, in the other he held the small pistol, the weapon within two feet of Dawson's head, the finger on the trigger.

His prisoner had in some way gotten free, was armed, and his evil face showed a determination to kill him if he offered any resistance whatever.

Now, the driver comprehended the reason of the outlaw's proposition.

Of course, if Doc Driggs was free, the others were so at large.

Dawson was a man of iron nerve. He had won the name upon the Overland of being perfectly fearless, the man who would face death unflinchingly in the dis-

charge of duty. Time and again had he risked his life to save his passengers and coach from robbery, and the number of wounds he bore testified to his faithfulness and nerve.

There was no back-down in Buck Dawson, if he could see the shadow of a chance to go through all right, but now he realized the perfectly hopeless position he was in.

The three men were free and against him, his only claim for mercy from them being his one-time service rendered Doc Driggs.

Still, he did not wholly give up, and in the seconds that passed he thought rapidly and well.

Not a sign of fear, or even worry, did he show as the outlaw covered him. He drew rein, and turning on his seat, said in his quiet and quaint manner of speaking:

"I say, Doc Driggs, does I look like a consarned fool?"

"Candor forces me to say that you does not, Buck."

"All right! Don't fergit that I ain't one, and jist let me say this—that, if you don't creep your head back inter that hearse winder mighty quick, I'll jist call out ter Buffalo Bill and his pards ter let fly, and ther way this old coach will be bored through with bullets will be right amoozin'—ter me."

Back went Doc Driggs' head into the coach.

The driver's bold bluff had won—thus far.

CHAPTER III.

THE DUEL.

The suddenness with which Doc Driggs drew back into the coach, at the words of the driver, caused his companions to fear that they were to be fired upon, and they crouched down between the seats with amusing alacrity.

In this act of the outlaw leader Buck Dawson had gained time, and had a chance to draw his revolver—just what he wanted.

Weapons were in both of his hands in a moment, and leaping quickly from his box, he took refuge behind a large tree.

He had put his brake on hard, to check the horses going forward, and, feeling confident that his passengers could have but the one weapon, and observing that it had been a small one, with single barrel, he did not consider his chances so very bad, after all.

His bold bluff would not last long, for if he did not

summon Buffalo Bill the outlaws would know that the scout was not there as an escort.

As soon as he had gained the tree Buck acted, and called out:

"See here, you cutthroat fellers."

"What does yer want?" demanded Doc Driggs, from the coach.

"I wants yer ter hands up all 'round and come out as I calls ther roll, bringing yer lariats with yer."

"Thet you may tie us up ag'in?"

"In course."

"It don't go."

"It's got ter, or somebody will be stiff, right here."

"Why don't yer call Buffalo Bill?" asked one.

"I'm not wantin' help jist now, fer I kin run this leetle racket all by my lone self."

"Yer better try it on, then."

"I'll do it."

"Say when."

"Is yer comin' out of that coach?"

"Nary come!"

"Then look out fer a hint thet yer had better."

With this Buck leaned around the tree, aimed for the upper part of the coach, and fired.

There was a startled chorus of cries within, and the men ducked down into the bottom of the coach as the bullet tore along the top.

But Buck had gained his point, as he was not fired on in return, and this convinced him that the outlaws had only the one little pistol.

"Is you coming out?"

"Nary come!"

"Look out!"

Again a bullet tore through the coach, lower down, and the horses began to grow uneasy.

But Buck soothed them with his voice and again called out:

"Does yer intend to mind?"

"Not a mind!"

"I'm a gittin' closer ter yer each time with my bullets."

"You dare not kill us."

"Well, I ain't a man ter draw trigger on a human bein' without good cause, but I thinks I has thet same right here and now."

Still no shot came from the coach, and no effort was made to dash out upon the defiant driver.

The outlaws were protecting themselves with cushions and crouching low as they could.

"Is yer comin' out? I is losing time, an' next time I shoots ter kill, and ef yer don't mind thet then I opens lively, fer I'll take four dead men inter ther fort if I can't take four live ones."

There was no reply from the coach, but Doc Driggs whispered to his comrades:

"I've got him covered through ther side, here, and ef he shows up well ter draw trigger ag'in, I'll risk a shot ter kill him."

Not knowing that he was now covered, Buck Dawson called out:

"Last call to you all!"

"Does yer come out?"

No answer.

"All right; here goes a bullet on a life hunt, and though I can't see yer, somebody's got ter take ther consequences."

A derisive laugh followed his words.

Then, not fearing a shot from the coach, the driver leant well around the tree, took quick aim at the coach body, and pulled trigger.

There was a wild cry from some one, followed by the words:

"My God, pards, I is done fer! He's kilt me! he's kilt me!"

The man fell back in the coach, dead, and grasping his body, Doc Driggs used it as a shield, and prepared to fire upon the driver, who once more called out:

"Will yer hands go up now? I ain't got ther time ter spare ter talk no longer, so talk quick!"

No answer save a puff of smoke from one of the curtains of the coach, and the deep report of the deringer pistol in the hands of Doc Driggs.

It had been well aimed, and with a zest, for Doc Driggs knew well how much depended upon that sole shot.

With a startled cry Buck Dawson stepped backward several paces; his revolver fell from his hand as he sought to raise it to fire on his foes, and down dropped the brave man his full length upon the ground.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HERO OF THE REINS.

"Pards, I got him!"

"Ther boodle is ours!"

So shouted Doc Driggs as he sprang from the coach, followed by his two remaining companions, while the fourth came tumbling out after them, to lay down upon the ground.

With a few bounds Doc Driggs reached the side of the driver, who lay in a heap upon the earth, just as he had fallen.

"Dead, and out of trouble," cried the outlaw.

Then, turning to the others, he called out to one of the men to get their belts of arms and rifles off the top of the coach. The other man was ordered to unharness the two leaders and one of the middle span of horses.

"We hain't got no saddles, pards, but we has got lives, a mount, and ther boodle, so we is playin' in great luck, when half a hour ago it were a hundred ter one thet we'd be hanged."

"Ill sarch fer ther boodle while you git ther horses; and mind yer, maybe Buffalo Bill and them two boy sure-shot pards of his may come this way. If the

don't come, some soldiers is likely ter be out on the trail, so don't waste no time."

This suggestion about Buffalo Bill and his two Texan boy pards set the outlaws to work with a will.

Doc Driggs first buckled on his belt of arms, handed down from the top of the coach, and then began to search for the gold he knew had been put on the coach.

The treasure was quickly found, and the bags were put in the ends of one of his own blankets, for their outfit had been brought along when they were captured.

The blanket was strapped upon one of the leaders, and Doc Driggs mounted, the others quickly following his example with two more of the horses.

"What's ter be done with Nobby?" asked one, pointing to their dead comrade.

"Leave him for coyote meat, or ther finder to bury, along with Buck Dawson.

"Now, is yer ready?" and Driggs seemed excitedly anxious to get away from the scene of his crime.

"We is ready," was the answer, and the men, now mounted, closed up with their leader.

"Then come!" and he went off at a gallop.

Hardly had the outlaws disappeared when a deep groan broke from the lips of Buck Dawson.

His face was deathly pale, and he appeared to be suffering greatly.

But, after several efforts, he rose to a sitting position; then he got upon his feet, and, tottering to his coach, got hold of his canteen, and took a long draught of water.

That done, he saturated his handkerchief, and, tearing open his shirt, bound it upon an ugly-looking wound in his side.

With an effort he placed the body of the dead outlaw in the coach, closed the door, and arranged the reins so that he could drive the middle horse as a leader.

This done, he dragged himself up to the box, tied himself there, as he was very weak, and started once more upon his way.

There was no stage station in the twenty miles between himself and the fort, he having passed one just before the outlaws had freed themselves.

The three horses had a fairly good trail to travel, and the coach being light, the brave driver, suffering untold anguish, pushed them hard on their way, for he felt that his strength was failing him fast.

"Am I to die thus?" he several times asked himself as he went along.

"No, no! I must not—cannot die thus, though this is the worst wound I ever received, and it seems to be tearing my very life out of me," and he groaned in agony.

Soon after he said:

"I am growing weaker and weaker. I will write now while I can, a letter to Buffalo Bill, telling him what I wish done—and he will avenge me."

The last five words were uttered in a very stern

tone, and as one who had full confidence in the scout's doing what he said.

With a pencil he wrote something on a sheet of paper and fastened it upon his breast with a pin.

This done he seemed to feel more content, though the groans wrung from him by each jolt of the coach showed how greatly he suffered.

On, on, went the three horses, until, at last, the flag of the fort came into view, a couple of miles away.

The brave driver saw it, and his head drooped upon his breast.

A moment later, the reins slipped from his hands, but he had already made them fast, so that they could not fall upon the backs of the horses.

Then he reeled to and fro, and fell back upon the box.

Had he not taken the precaution to tie himself to the box he would have fallen to the ground.

And on went the horses at a trot, until they halted at the fort, where a crowd was gathering, as the sentinel had reported the coach coming in with but three of its team of six animals, and no one on the box driving them.

CHAPTER V.

BUFFALO BILL AND HIS TEXAS TEAM.

The arrival of the coach at the fort created a decided sensation.

At first supposed to be dead, Buck Dawson was found to be still breathing, and was hastily borne to the hospital, where the fort surgeons, after a long time, extracted the bullet and reported that the chances of his recovery were very doubtful.

When, the next day, Buffalo Bill and his two Texan pards came to the fort they heard with deep regret and almost dismay of the attack upon Buck Dawson and the result.

It was the scout who had given the four outlaws into the keeping of the driver, and certainly he had considered them most securely bound.

Instead, they had escaped by wounding Dawson; and, though one of the four had fallen by Buck's shot, the other three had escaped, carrying off three of the horses, as well as many thousands of dollars in uncoined gold.

Buffalo Bill felt that now he had a double duty of vengeance.

The scout, with his two young pards, had been out on the special work of finding out what had been the fate of the Midnight Mail Rider, and he had been most anxious to do this, to relieve the mind of Harold Hart, the son of the missing man, whom he had promised to solve the mystery hanging over his father's disappearance.

This done, through the aid of the dog, Deathgrip, and the two horses, Blue and Gray, belonging to the

Mail Rider, the chief of scouts had returned to the fort with the story of the finding of the skeleton form in the cavern, and bearing with him the story written by the dying man.

But the scout and his two young Texan pards had also discovered by that same story written by the dying Mail Rider, that Doc Driggs and others had been his murderers and the robbers of the mails.

They had learned, likewise, that there had been a "mysterious unknown" who was the leader of the band, yet was masked and seemed not known to any one of them.

Who can he be?

That was what Buffalo Bill had been most anxious to find out.

Doc Driggs, Scotty, and others named by the dying Mail Rider, they had believed to be safe at the fort, where they had been sent, as we have seen, on Buck Dawson's coach, but now the scout knew the worst—that the scoundrels had escaped, and had added other crimes to their past evil deeds.

So it was that Buffalo Bill renewed the vow to run down the masked leader, recapture Doc Driggs, and Scotty, with the others of the band who had killed the Midnight Mail Rider, and thus avenge the latter and Buck Dawson as well, while he would render, at the same time, good service to the government and country.

In this resolve both Harold Hart and his comrade, Len Ashley, eagerly entered the scout's service.

"Boy pards, you have determined to help me, then?" said Buffalo Bill, after the three had visited the hospital and gazed upon the suffering and unconscious stage driver, hovering between life and death.

"I have vowed to avenge my father, Mr. Cody, now I know who it was that murdered him, and cast upon his name the stain of having robbed the mails he was sworn to protect," said Harold Hart.

"And I am with Harold in all that he may do," was Len Ashley's decision.

"I wish you to understand fully what is before you, that it will be a perilous trail to follow—that both of you cannot hope to escape wounds or death, in the work of revenge, and it will be a hard, long trail, perhaps."

"We will not shrink from anything before us," declared Harold.

"I well know that, boys, but it is my duty to tell you what you may have to encounter."

"You know it was through good Buck Dawson, Mr. Cody, that I got the information which led to the finding out of my father's sad fate, and also the two horses and dog belonging to him, so I owe it to avenge him also by aiding in the recapture of Doc Driggs."

"And I am with you, Hart, you and Chief Cody, in all that you do, or undertake," Len Ashley said, in his quiet, determined way.

"Well, boy pards, it is a compact even to the death of one or more of us?"

"We have given our word, Chief Cody, and death alone can make us break it." was Harold Hart's solemn assurance.

CHAPTER VI.

A MYSTERIOUS TRACK.

Buck Dawson was hovering between life and death, and wholly unable to tell of the attack upon him and the robbery of the coach; all that Buffalo Bill had to go upon was the fact that Doc Driggs and three other prisoners had been left with the driver to take to the fort.

The driver had arrived badly wounded, with one of the prisoners dead in the coach, the gold gone, and that was all that could be found out, save that three of the coach horses had also been taken.

The scout's first move was to have a talk with Colonel Ramsey, and get leave to take his own way in avenging the Midnight Mail Rider by running down the road-agents.

He accordingly left the fort with the two boys, and started upon his trail to foil other deeds of the outlaws and get upon their trail, and which he had vowed should be a fatal one for them.

A led horse was carried along, a fine animal, to replace one of those they rode, should they meet with accident.

The animal also carried a pack-saddle, in which was a complete camp outfit, provisions, extra ammunition, and other things the scout suspected they might need.

Leaving the fort by sunset, the three rode to a camping-place near the scene of the tragedy which poor Buck Dawson told about.

"We'll be on the spot by dawn, boys, and let me say that if we do not find the three coach horses dead there, then they were taken by the road-agents, and their trail can be followed.

"If they elude us, and they may be able to do so, then the mining camps will be the place for you two to go and play detectives upon the miners there, to find out just who are the allies of Doc Driggs, and the identification of this mysterious masked leader that the Mail Rider said was the chief in the attack upon him."

With perfect confidence in Buffalo Bill, the two boys were more than willing to follow his lead without a word.

They went into camp that night, and bright and early the next morning were upon the scene of the escape of Doc Driggs and his two pards.

"No horse here," said Buffalo Bill, who was reading the signs about him with a skill that is phenomenal in him.

He at once saw the whole situation, as it was at the attack on Buck Dawson, and the tracks of the three

horses taken from the coach had left a broad trail, easy to follow.

"Here lies our way, boy pards," said Buffalo Bill, and as he started off on the trail he added:

"But four horses left this trail, not three."

"Only three were taken from the coach, sir."

"True, but another animal went along on this trail."

"Now, the outlaws were four in number, and one came in with the coach, and dead, so that accounted for him."

"Three remained, and three horses were taken from the coach."

"Still, from where they left the Overland trail there are the tracks of four different horses."

"Who rode the fourth animal, and was he the one who rescued the prisoners?"

"It looks as though he might be, sir."

"Yes."

"But we must find out."

The tracks of the four horses were followed for several hours, and the direction they led was up toward the string of mining camps.

"Boy pards, these fellows were carrying coals to Newcastle, so to speak; that is, they were carrying the gold they got from the coach back to the mining camps."

"What does that mean, sir?"

"It means that they can send it out from the mining camps and realize upon it in cash, while they would not dare do so any other way."

"We will see how far we can track them, and then, if we lose the trail, can at least discover to which mining camp they have gone, and, mark my words, either Doc Driggs, or that masked unknown, is the captain of a well-disciplined band of road-agents, as has been shown by recent robberies, so if we can track them to doom, it will be a feather in our cap, and no mistake."

It was without the slightest difficulty that Buffalo Bill followed the trail of the three stage horses and the fourth animal, which the scout said had been the last to go along.

Buffalo Bill, as he went forward, saw signs that Indians had been near the place as well as outlaws.

He told his companions to remain behind, as they were not as experienced in Indian trickery as he was, and might do something to attract the attention of the Indians.

Buffalo Bill dismounted, and, taking advantage of every bit of cover, went forward.

It was well he did so, for he soon saw a band of five redskins. They had evidently caught sight of his companions, and were stealthily advancing to take them unawares.

Buffalo Bill climbed a nearby tree, and, sheltering himself in the branches, watched the savages approach the boys, who were all unsuspecting of his coming.

Suddenly his wild warcry rang out, and his terrible rifle began to crack.

He fired just five shots, and left five redskins dead, and was just descending from the tree when the boys whose lives he had saved came up to see what the shooting meant.

The sight of the five dead Indians explained matters to them, and after thanking the scout heartily for saving their lives they proceeded on their journey.

As they entered a valley they came to where two streams met, and four separate branches were thus formed.

"Here is where we will lose them, I fear, or at least be detained some time in finding them," said Buffalo Bill.

It was just as Buffalo Bill had said, the tracks disappeared in the stream that crossed their trail, and did not reappear upon the other side.

It showed to the scout that the outlaws had kept in the shallow stream, and thus made their way into one of the others, hiding their tracks completely by so doing.

The scout paused for a long while, pondering over in his mind as to just what the outlaws had done, and while thus engaged Harold and Len were riding about in search of whatever they might find of value.

Presently a call came from Harold Hart, and both Buffalo Bill and Len Ashley rode rapidly toward him.

"See here, Mr. Cody, I have been on this single trail, and it has led in a circuit around and across the streams."

"It is the fourth track we saw with the three stage horses, and I am sure that the rider of this horse was doing what we are doing, following the others, so suppose we stick to this trail, as, if he is one of them, he may know better than we do where to find them."

"Good for you, Harold, and we will stick to this single trail," and getting the pack-horse, they rode off on the tracks of the fourth horse that had mysteriously followed the coach animals.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CLIFF.

The fourth track had certainly been following the trail of the three coach horses, as had Buffalo Bill and his boy sure shots.

It had been thrown off the trail at the crossing of the stream, as had the trio of trailers, and then, to find it again, had begun to make circles around the spot, each circle increasing in size, and thus crossing and recrossing the stream time and again.

As the scout followed this single track unerringly, he knew that they would either there find the trail of the stolen coach horses, or, at least, could keep on after the single one, and certainly it had some connection with the other, left by the outlaws or else why follow on after them so diligently?

He knew that not one of his scouts was absent from the fort, so it could not be one of his men, and why

would any one else pursue those three stolen coach horses so untiringly, unless he knew just what it would lead him to.

At last the scout halted, and in silence pointed to the ground.

It was growing near night, and they were miles away from where the tracks of the three coach horses had entered the stream and been lost.

But the clever plan of the single horseman had been successful in picking up the trail he so diligently had sought, for there were the three tracks again left by the coach horses.

They had just left the stream, having turned up the one they entered, ridden in its bed for miles, and then left it to push on their way in the same direction they had just been going.

"We'll push on rapidly, boy parads, now we have found the outlaws' trail again by following this single track.

"But who can this persistent trailer be who has aided us so well, I wonder?"

On they rode until the sun was on the horizon, and Buffalo Bill said:

"There is a good camping-place on a cliff a couple of miles ahead, and I think the trail leads there, or near it, at least, so if we lose it in the darkness, we will not have far to go to find it in the morning."

"How far ahead of us do you think they are, Mr. Cody?" asked Harold.

"The outlaws are fully thirty-six hours ahead, but this single track is not over twelve," was the answer.

"You read signs well, sir. Somehow I have perfect faith that you will track Doc Driggs and the other murderers of my father down."

"I trust so, and this mysterious masked leader, for Doc Driggs is only a tool in his hands, I feel certain—ah! see there!"

It was dark now, and the scout pointed ahead to where a light was visible, some distance ahead.

"It is a campfire."

"Yes, in the very camping-place I spoke of."

"Deathgrip sees it," and Buffalo Bill pointed to the huge and savage-looking dog which had belonged to the murdered Midnight Mail Rider and then been given to Harold Hart by Buck Dawson.

Deathgrip was sniffing the air as he had his eyes turned upon the campfire.

"Lead on, Deathgrip," said Harold, and the dog trotted on ahead, for the trail they had been following was too cold for him to follow, so he had simply kept his place behind his young master's horse until the firelight came in view.

Slowly they rode ahead, and soon discovered that the campfire was burning briskly, near the foot of the cliff, and by its light they saw a man working hard with a pick on the ground.

Buffalo Bill halted, and the boys did also, all three

gazing at the movements of the man with considerable interest.

The fire was evidently kept up to aid him with light in his work, whatever it was.

"There is only one there," said Harold.

"Yes, and I see his horse staked out near," Len remarked.

"He is the one we have been following, for the others are not there," Buffalo Bill added.

"What can he be doing?" asked Harold.

"If appearances speak for anything, I would say, as he has pick and shovel there, that he was digging for gold."

"At night, and by firelight?"

"So it appears at a glance, though that is not what he is doing."

"What is it then, sir?"

"He is digging a grave."

"Ah! but where is the body to bury in it?"

"Do you see yonder where his saddle lies?"

"Yes, sir."

"A blanket covers some object on the ground."

"Ah, yes, and one can never mistake a dead form covered up, for it has a look peculiarly its own."

"You are right, Harold."

"The man is digging a grave, and he has the corpse ready."

"But who is the man and who was the corpse?" asked Len Ashley. "I will find out."

"Hold my horse, and I will take Deathgrip with me, for he seems to see, or know, more than we do about this night burial," and Buffalo Bill pointed to the dog's great anxiety to go ahead and investigate.

CHAPTER VIII.

JUDGE DOOM, THE TERROR OF THE TOUGHS.

Buffalo Bill threw his bridle rein to Harold, dismounted, and patting Deathgrip on the head, said in a low tone:

"Come, good dog, we'll go forward and see what this grave-digging racket means, for it has a queer, uncanny look."

The dog detective seemed to understand perfectly what was said to him and trotted along behind the scout, as though fully satisfied now that something was to be done that should not be put off.

The two boys sat on their horses fully three hundred yards from the grave digger at work, the bright firelight revealing him distinctly.

The spot where he was at work was the very one referred to by the scout as a good camping-place.

There was a cliff there, a small stream, some timber, and a meadow land, all sheltered by surrounding hills and near which led no trail.

Once before the scout had camped there, when hunting Indians, and he knew that there was no reason for a white man to visit this spot unless he was lost, or had

THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES.

some deep purpose, such as the lone grave digger must have.

As he drew nearer Buffalo Bill saw that the man was of splendid physique, was dressed in a suit of black, wore a large-brimmed sombrero, high-top boots, and a white shirt.

About his waist was a belt of arms, the silver-adorned weapons glimmering in the firelight as he worked.

His face was darkly bronzed and he wore a long brown beard, and his hair fell in waves upon his broad shoulders, but was well cared for, as though the man was anxious to appear neat and well dressed, in spite of his surroundings.

Upon his nose Buffalo Bill observed that he wore a pair of gold eyeglasses, and altogether the lone grave digger was a very striking personage.

But with pick and shovel he was surely digging a grave, or had done so, for, as the scout looked on, now not two hundred feet from him, he seemed to have finished his weird task.

Crouching in a gully, the dog by his side, Buffalo Bill was watching the man with increasing interest as he saw him turn from the grave, and walk to the spot where the covered form lay awaiting burial.

But it was not the blanket-covered form that the grave digger picked up.

Instead he took in each hand a canvas bag that seemed to be full of something heavy.

"If that is not gold in those bags, then I am away off, and the man I know well, for it is none other than the one they call Judge Doom, the Red Hand of the Mines.

"Now, to see what follows, for I am getting intensely interested in all this mysterious work, for is that man, the Terror of the Troughs, as he is also called, true or false, I should like to know," and Buffalo Bill's eyes watched every movement of the man before him.

He saw the man in black, seemingly so out of place in that wild country, pick up two bags that were apparently of considerable weight, and place them by the side of the open grave.

Into the grave he then got, and, taking the bags, stooped down out of sight.

He remained unseen for a few minutes, and then reappeared.

He sprang lightly out of the grave, and walked over to the place where he had gotten the other two bags, took up a couple more of about the same size as the others.

These were taken to the grave and placed within, as were the others, the firelight revealing distinctly all that was done.

Buffalo Bill watched attentively from his place of concealment, near at hand, while the two boys in the distance also saw the movements of the man in black, but could not tell just what he was doing.

The scout saw and knew that the man was burying bags of gold in that grave he had dug, and hiding them in such a way that they would not be found were it opened.

He knew the man as one who had the appearance of a gentleman, was educated, refined, and had come West for a fortune, he said.

He was known only as what he was in the mines, a gold-hunter, one who rode a fine horse, was splendidly armed, carried a pick and shovel tied to his saddle, would be prospecting for gold for days alone in the mountains, and with considerable success at times.

He was a man who dressed well, in his eccentric style for the frontier, and bore the names of the Red Hand of the Mines, Judge Doom, the Terror of the Troughs, and the Man in Black, from his style of attire.

He was known as a dead shot, and the foe of all outlaws and desperadoes, for when they were known he at once demanded a trial for them, sat as Judge Lynch himself, and they were surely sentenced to death, hence his name of Judge Doom.

As he had always shown himself a deadly hand with the revolver, he had been given the name of Red Hand, but to his credit be it said he never sought a quarrel, and always was on the side of peace until patience ceased to be a virtue.

As the man had a fine voice, played the violin and guitar well, told a good story, and was a brilliant conversationalist, he had become very popular with officers at the forts, and frequently visited them.

But still nothing was known by any of them of him other than that he had come West to find a fortune and then meant to return East and enjoy it.

The commanding officers regarded him as an able ally in putting down lawlessness on the border, though he had a severe way of doing it, and yet here he was digging a grave in a secluded spot by night, and burying gold, while a body lay also near awaiting burial.

It was no wonder that Buffalo Bill did not just understand what Judge Doom, the Red Hand, was doing.

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGE SITUATION.

As Judge Doom disappeared for a second time in the open grave, with the other two bags he was to bury there, the dog crouching close by the side of Buffalo Bill gave a low growl, hardly audible, and fixed his eyes upon another spot within the arc of light from the fire.

Looking in that direction, Buffalo Bill saw a man's form appear, run a few yards to a large tree, and stand behind it, where he would not be visible by the one in the grave when he should reappear.

This second individual stood where Buffalo Bill had a good view of him.

In an instant almost he recognized him as one of

Doc Driggs' crowd of four that had been sent to the fort under the charge of Buck Dawson.

He saw that he was one of the trio who had escaped, the body of the fourth having been brought in by the driver.

"His name is Loper, and if he is about then Doc Driggs and the other must be somewhere near.

"Things are growing more and more interesting," muttered the scout.

The man behind the tree had his rifle in hand, but it was held upright and not on a level.

If he intended harm against Judge Doom he was not in a hurry, but would wait a while.

The scout also felt that he also could afford to wait.

The two young Texans at a distance had also seen the man run from the shelter of the timber to the large tree.

But they knew that Buffalo Bill was lying in wait and would look after him at the proper time.

So they concluded to also patiently await developments.

In the meanwhile Judge Doom reappeared above the edge of the grave, leaped out as before, and walked back toward the tree beneath which lay the blanket-covered form.

He stooped and took the blanket off, and a human face was revealed.

Then he spread the blanket upon the ground, leaned over, and, raising the body with great ease apparently, placed it upon what was to serve as its winding sheet.

He rolled the form up closely in the blanket, raised it again with an ease that showed very great strength, and bore it to the grave.

Placing it on the edge, he leaped down into the grave, and, raising the form, disappeared with it in the dark and loathsome depths.

Judge Doom was without doubt a humane man, if his actions went for anything.

Whether he had killed the man or not, he did not intend to pitch him into the grave, but to place him at length in it, with decency and respect.

The man behind the tree was watching Judge Doom with intense interest.

The scout was watching the man behind the tree with an equal interest.

The two young sure shots were watching the man behind the tree and waiting for some move on the part of the scout.

The man in the grave, all unconscious that there were eyes upon him, was humanely placing the blanket-covered form in the grave.

The situation was certainly increasing in interest and intensity.

The dog had his eyes upon the man behind the tree.

So had the scout, for he saw enough to cause him to be upon his guard.

He saw the man raise his rifle now, bringing the muzzle toward the grave.

Judge Doom was yet invisible, placing the body in the grave and seemingly taking great pains with his task of burying the dead.

A moment more and his head and shoulders appeared.

Then he placed his hands upon either side of the grave to draw himself out.

This seemed the moment for the man behind the tree to act.

He brought his rifle up to his shoulder, and began to draw a sight upon Judge Doom.

He was very deliberate about his deadly work, very, indeed.

So sure of his victim did he seem that he would not hurry, but would take deliberate aim and make no mistake.

He was an outlaw, a desperado, one of the robbers of the coach, and perhaps the one who had given Buck Dawson the wound that might prove fatal.

The scout did not know this, but he did know that the man was an outlaw, a raider upon the property of others.

He was a man who killed for gain, and now he was to turn his rifle upon the life of a man universally admired in the mines, a man of good deeds, but of severe justice, the friend of all in need.

The intended murderer must not add another victim to his list.

Even then his companions might be near, ready to run in and claim the booty, when Judge Doom had fallen.

The scout was quick to act to save a valuable life.

Before the man behind the tree could pull trigger the scout fired.

CHAPTER X.

THE BOY SURE-SHOTS CHIP IN.

With the crack of Buffalo Bill's rifle the man behind the tree sank in his tracks, his finger on the trigger causing the weapon to go off as it dropped from his hand.

At the two shots so close together Judge Doom made a leap back for the grave, and disappeared within it.

His first thought was that he had been fired at.

His second thought was self-preservation.

The grave was a good protection for him, though a dismal and suggestive one, perhaps.

His rifle was back by the tree where had been the bags of gold and the dead body.

But Judge Doom had his revolvers, and dead shot that he was and protected by a grave, he knew that it would be a hot fight before he fell.

The scout realized just what Judge Doom felt, and saw just what he did.

He had not intended to kill the man behind the tree. He had aimed to shatter the hand that pressed the

trigger, for the firelight revealed his form bent forward distinctly.

But it was Deathgrip, the dog, that caused the deadly shot.

He nudged Buffalo Bill's elbow with his nose just as the scout pulled trigger.

This changed the aim a little, and the bullet went into the breast of the man behind the tree.

Whether Deathgrip gave that nudge on purpose, he certainly was responsible for the man's death, the scout's fatal aim.

But the situation did not lag in interest with the death of the man behind the tree and spring of Judge Doom to the cover of the grave.

Shouts followed the shots from a distance, and into view dashed a party of horsemen, while the cry of the leader was distinctly heard:

"Loper has killed him, and, by Heaven, I shall hang him for it."

There were three persons who recognized that voice.

Those three were Buffalo Bill, Harold Hart, and Len Ashley.

They knew that it was none other than Doc Driggs who had spoken, the very man they were in search of.

He had a strange voice, and once heard was not easily forgotten.

The two young Texans saw in the indistinct light five horsemen dash out of the timber near them and ride for the campfire at full speed.

They had heard them approaching before they appeared, and stood ready for them, silent and anxious, yet not daring to warn Buffalo Bill.

The two shots had started the scene of silence to action, for upon hearing the two rifles the leader of the horsemen had uttered the cry that he did.

Instantly the horsemen appeared the two young Texans decided to act.

Who the man in the grave was, friend or foe, they did not know or care.

They knew Buffalo Bill's aim too well not to feel that he had downed the man behind the tree.

He was there, and five horsemen were dashing toward him.

They knew that one of those five was Doc Driggs, Buffalo Bill's bitterest foe, while the words he had uttered seemed to indicate that he was the friend of the man in the grave, whom Loper had sought to kill, for he had said he would hang him for it.

They knew that Loper was one of the four men left in the charge of Buck Dawson, hence he was an outlaw.

With the five horsemen dashing toward Buffalo Bill, and Doc Driggs leading them, the scout's boy sure-shots acted promptly and with deadly effect.

"Don't aim at Doc Driggs, Len, for I wish to catch him alive—he is in the lead," had said Harold Hart.

The two youths sat upon their horses in the edge of the timber.

With the bright starlight, the open space between them and the camp, and the blazing firelight, they could see well.

The five horsemen had left the timber not a hundred yards from where they were watching and waiting.

"I wouldn't kill Doc Driggs for a fortune, Harold, for we want him alive, not dead, as you say," was Len Ashley's rejoinder to his comrade's request to spare the outlaw leader.

"All right, we'll fire now, if you are ready."

"All ready."

"Which is your man?"

"The one next to the leader."

"Good!"

"I'll take the one on the white horse."

"All right."

"Ready! aim! fire!"

The rifle of Harold Hart flashed a second the soonest, then the rifle barrel of Len Ashley's gun, followed quickly by the shotgun barrel, loaded with bullets.

Two men dropped from their saddles at the rifle fire, for the boy sure-shots had aimed well, while a horse fell and a rider was wounded by the shower of bullets from the shotgun barrel Len Ashley had turned loose in the midst of the outlaws.

CHAPTER XI.

GOOD WORK ALL AROUND.

The intention of Doc Driggs, as the sure shots had decided the leader of the horsemen was, to hang Loper if he had killed the man in the grave, was quickly changed when he heard two rifle reports, followed by a louder one, come from the timber on his left, and saw two of his followers drop from their saddles.

He was quick in his movements to protect himself, and in wheeling his horse, saw an animal go down and heard a third one of his men cry out:

"I've got it in the hip, cap'n."

"Come with me," shouted Doc Driggs, and lying low on the neck of his horse, he went flying back to the shelter of the timber.

"Halt, Doc Driggs, or I will kill you!" shouted Harold Hart, springing toward him, his revolvers drawn now.

Len Ashley was close upon his heels.

But the command of the youth went unheeded, while Doc Driggs and his two remaining comrades spurred for dear life into the timber, and continued their break-neck speed through it.

The youths halted at the edge of the timber, listened, found that the outlaws were flying with all speed, and while Len Ashley went to get the led horse, Harold rode on to where the two outlaws had fallen, at the same time calling out in a loud voice:

"Ho, Mr. Cody!"

"Ay, ay, boy pard!"

"They were outlaws, five of them, led by Doc

Driggs, but Len and I have two of them here and wounded another, who escaped with the others."

"Good for you, boys."

"Come on here, for I have a man dead here, and one I know is under cover in the grave here."

"We'll come right along, sir," answered Harold, as he dismounted by the two men, who lay close together.

As he placed the form of one across his saddle, Len came up with the pack-horse, and said:

"There are their horses, Harold, so I will rope them in."

This he did quickly, the bodies of the two men were thrown across the saddles, and the equipments of the animal killed by Len's shotgun were stripped off, and also taken with them.

They advanced slowly toward the campfire, Deathgrip bounding forward to meet them with a yelp of delight at the success that Buffalo Bill and his boy pards had accomplished.

Buffalo Bill had meanwhile attended to his end of the situation.

The dash of the five mounted outlaws, the cry of Doc Driggs, and the three shots from the boys had indeed been a surprise to him.

He had recognized Loper as one of Doc Driggs' comrades, and yet the outlaw had appeared suddenly with four others.

From whence had he come?

Who was the dead man Judge Doom had put in the grave?

Was the gold Judge Doom had buried that which had been taken from Buck Dawson's coach?

If so, how did the Red Hand get hold of it?

Then, too, what had the words of Doc Driggs meant, that if the man, Loper, had killed the man at the grave, he would hang him?

These questions were a puzzle to Buffalo Bill.

He could get no satisfactory answers to them in his own mind.

But he would soon solve the mystery, and hence he called out:

"Ho, Judge Doom, are you there?"

"Ay, ay, who calls me?" came the answer from the man in the grave.

"I am Buffalo Bill."

"Ah, Cody, glad indeed to see you."

"But who fired those first two shots?"

"One I fired, and at an outlaw by the name of Loper, who lies behind yonder tree, and was just about to kill you."

"God bless you, Cody, then I owe you my life," and Judge Doom leaped out of the grave.

"I did not intend to kill him, judge, but to wound him in the hand and capture him; but Deathgrip here nudged my arm and changed my aim."

The scout had walked toward the tree behind which lay the dead outlaw.

Judge Doom had done the same.

They met there, and, grasping the scout's hand, Judge Doom again warmly thanked him for saving his life, and asked:

"Did you say that he was an outlaw, Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes, sir, one of Doc Driggs' band, the latter being the leader of a gang of road-agents, and whose trail I am on, along with two young pards, who seem to have had trouble over yonder where I left them."

"I saw your campfire, as we were on the outlaws' trail, and then I saw you, burying a body, just as I discovered this man run to this tree and take aim at you as you appeared above the grave, so I fired, and my bullet doubtless caused his finger to pull trigger in a death clutch."

"God bless you again, Cody, my good friend, for I am not anxious to die yet, though I live with my life in my hands, as it were, out here."

"I have much to live for, and I shall never forget you, no, never," and the man spoke with considerable feeling.

"Don't mention it, judge, for it just came my way to be of service."

"Now to my boy pards!" and Buffalo Bill answered the hail of Harold Hart.

A moment after the two boys rode up with the pack-horse, the captured animals of the two outlaws, with their riders' dead bodies upon their backs.

They gazed with considerable interest upon the tall form in black standing by the side of Buffalo Bill, but as the scout seemed not unfriendly toward him, they were assured that he was not a foe, yet recognized him as the grave digger of half an hour before.

CHAPTER XII.

IN LUCK.

The man in black also eyed the two young Texans as they rode up.

The picture was a strange one and thrilling, though all were so calm.

There lay Loper, the dead outlaw, and Deathgrip was watching him as though he half believed he was "playing possum" and he expected to see him get up and skip.

The scout and Judge Doom stood near each other, and two splendid-looking men they were.

The two Texas boys stood at the head of their horses, while the bodies of the dead outlaws they had brought in were lying across the saddles.

After he had taken in the situation, Buffalo Bill said: "Boy pards, I wish to introduce you to a friend whom I only know as Judge Doom, the Red Hand Regulator."

"He is a miner, and the terror of desperadoes, and I am fortunate in finding him here just in time to save him from the bullet of this dead outlaw."

"Judge, these are boy pards of mine, who have come

West to find a fortune, I may say, in the mining country.

"They were met by Doc Driggs and his band, and I got them out of a scrape, and they aided me to catch the outlaws who had boarded Buck Dawson's coach to rob him.

"We sent them on to the fort under Buck's care, but they got loose in some way, wounded poor Dawson, perhaps fatally, though he killed one of the quartette, and three escaped with the gold, a very large sum.

"We were on their trail, and found a solitary horseman also following them, and I take it that you were the man.

"It's a long story, judge, but that is the situation from our standpoint."

The man in black had listened with deepest interest to the scout's somewhat lengthened out story, and then shook hands with the two boys, welcomed them to the Wild West, and said that they could count him as one of their friends.

"And that means a good deal, boy pards," said Buffalo Bill.

Then Judge Doom remarked:

"Well, Cody, I'll tell my story now, for I have something to say also of interest."

"I have no doubt of it, judge," said the scout.

"You know I prospect a great deal alone for gold?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I was out on my gold hunt, with my pick and shovel, when I witnessed from a distance the outlaws leave the coach in the trail and go off with the three horses and considerable booty apparently.

"I did not have my rifle, only my pick and shovel, with my belt of arms, so did not care to bite off more than I could chew by attacking them.

"I was a long way from my camp, and on foot, so I set off for it, and when I got there, saddled up and started back to the scene of the hold-up.

"The coach was gone, but I took the trail of the outlaws and followed it."

"And followed it well, judge, for you aided us to find it when we lost it in the crossing of the stream."

"It was lucky for me that I did, Buffalo Bill.

"I tracked those men to this point, saw that there were three of them, shot one from cover, and dashed upon the other two.

"They were just saddled up to leave, so mounted their horses and escaped, leaving their dead comrade and booty behind them.

"I pursued them for some distance, then returned here and found the man I had killed lying by their stolen booty.

"He proved to be a man by the name of Scotty, whom I knew in the mines, and once had nursed me most kindly through a spell of illness.

"I knew him, judge.

"He was Doc Driggs' right bower."

"Well, he is dead now, and for what he had been I determined to bury him decently.

"I decided also to make the grave the hiding-place of the stolen gold, until I could report to Colonel Ramsey that I had recaptured it, so I dug into the side of the dirt wall and made a secret shelf for it to rest in.

"You see I did not dare take it with me, as it was heavy, and I might be held up myself."

"You did right, judge, and I am glad that you retook it."

"I had just hidden it away in the grave and was burying Scotty's body when I heard those shots.

"Now you see I was wise, for Loper returned to kill me and get it, after his flight with Doc Driggs, and it seems that the latter also came back with reinforcements to hunt me down, kill me, and get the gold back."

"That is just it, judge."

"And but for you and these brave boy pards of yours it would have been done, Cody, so you see how deeply grateful I am to you all."

"It is fortunate all around, judge, for your life was saved, you killed one of the gang, and a hard one, too, thus saving the gold that had been taken from the coach, and I got another one, thus partly avenging Buck Dawson, whether he gets well or dies, while my boy pards here got two more of Doc Driggs' men, and the leader is a fugitive now, and will be very careful about making other attacks."

"I hope so, Buffalo Bill, for I have not faith in his great pluck, though he is cunning as a fox, treacherous, and very clever in his acts of lawlessness."

"He has his neck in the rope's end now, sir, and some day it will be drawn taut and Satan will get his own," said Buffalo Bill, and his look and tone were convincing proof that he intended that Doc Driggs should not escape him.

CHAPTER XIII.

PREPARED FOR THE WORST.

The gold having been recovered through Judge Doom, Buffalo Bill decided that it would be best to start with it to the fort, so there would be no danger of losing it again, as Doc Driggs would at once get others of his band together and make an attempt to once more get possession of so valuable a treasure.

The judge urged delay until the morning, after a night's camp, but the scout said they would only remain long enough to bury the dead outlaws, and then start.

The bodies were gathered together, wrapped in their blankets, and all put in the same grave, the deep one dug by Judge Doom.

This being filled up and logs placed over it, Buffalo Bill packed the gold bags upon his own led horse, and all having had supper, the start was made for the fort.

Buffalo Bill led the pack-horse himself, and each of the boys started with one of the dead outlaws' horses in

lead, the judge saying that he would go on his way to Flush City, the mining camp where he had his home.

With a warm handshake all around, the judge went on his way, while Buffalo Bill cut across country to strike the stage trail and meet the coach on its way to the fort.

He knew the driver who would be on the box in place of Buck Dawson, and if he could send the gold and the two horses of the outlaws on by him, he would be able to get at once upon the trail of Doc Driggs and the two men who had escaped with him.

Before parting with Judge Doom the scout had asked him his opinion as to who it could be that was secretly the leader of the road-agent band, remarking:

"I am sure that it cannot be Doc Driggs, that he is merely the tool in the hands of some brilliant scamp who is a clever captain and yet keeps himself unknown."

"What reason have you to believe this, Cody, for I may be able to entrap him if you give me a clew to work upon?" asked Judge Doom.

"That I cannot do, sir, for I do not know."

"But Doc Driggs is no more the leader of that band than I am—that is, the brains of it, and that I will some day prove."

"Well, call upon me whenever you feel that I can help you."

"I will do so, and I feel sure that you can aid me, or rather us, for the boys are in the hunt with me to stay," was the scout's reply.

When the stage trail was reached it was after midnight, and Buffalo Bill halted and said:

"Boy pards, you saw that I kept all the extra clothing that I could get from those dead outlaws."

The youths remarked that they had observed the fact.

"Well, now, I'll show you what I did it for, so get to work to help me, and we will make three very respectable looking effigies of men."

The boys dismounted, and while one cut some grass to use as stuffing, another got the lariats together to bind the effigies on their horses, the scout meanwhile getting each suit together to make a dummy man with.

The three effigies were soon complete, and upon one was placed Buffalo Bill's hat, the other two having Harold's and Len's sombreros for head covering.

The one wearing Buffalo Bill's hat was fastened securely upon the scout's horse, and held upright in the saddle with sticks.

The other two were arranged in like manner, upon the two horses ridden by the boys.

This left the pack-animal, bearing the gold also, and the two horses belonging to the outlaws, and upon these the scout and his boy pards were to ride.

"We must lie down on them so as to look like packs in the darkness, and we will play our part as well as the dummies will play theirs."

"My horse will lead the way, just as though I was in the saddle, and all will travel in Indian file and be held together by lariats, so there will be no stampeding."

"Then you really expect to be attacked, Mr. Cody?"

"Oh, yes, Harold, for Doc Driggs knew that Judge Doom would give up the gold, and I would carry it to the fort."

"He could cut us off and get to this trail before we did, and then ambush us."

"There were three of them, counting the man you wounded, and perhaps he was not so badly hurt but that he could help in Doc Driggs' deviltry."

"Even if he did not, two of them would be enough at the spot I feel sure he will select to ambush us, while he may have others of the band near whom he can call upon to aid him."

"I see, and you wish the dummies to catch the bullets intended for us."

"Exactly, Harold, and we will slip off our horses and be ready for the outlaws, if they are half a dozen even."

"Just give the word, Mr. Cody, and your boy pards will be with you to the end," said Len Ashley.

"I know that well; but I'll explain fully the plan of ambush, and just what we are to do if fired upon."

"My horse will keep the others from running off, and if it comes to a fight, we will be under cover and thus have the outlaws on equal terms; but if you see an outlaw, shoot to kill, unless it be Doc Driggs, and he must not be shot down but captured, for I want that man alive, for he is more valuable by far living than dead."

"Now we'll push ahead, and if we are not fired on, we have at least the satisfaction of being prepared."

"And that is half the battle," said Harold.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE UNKNOWN CAPTAIN.

"When the end comes and I jail those road-agents, it will be a fatal jail to them, I promise you," Buffalo Bill had said when he had fully explained the situation and his plans to the two young Texans, Harold Hart responding:

"I feel that it will be a terrible trail to avenge my poor father, Mr. Cody, but neither Len or myself will shrink from it, and we will try and prove worthy of our great leader."

Buffalo Bill silently bowed at the compliment, and then mounting, the scout's horse was put in the lead and the uncertain trail was begun.

It would take a keen eye, even in daylight, at a short distance, to say that the dummies in the saddle in advance were not real men, so at night there would be no suspicion of that kind in the minds of those who would ambush them.

Buffalo Bill read the plans of the outlaws from his

long experience in fighting them, and his knowledge of what they would do to gain their ends.

He was morally sure that they would try and head him off, that, though they had fled from the camp, they had not gone far, but from a distance had been watching them.

Seeing that they took the gold, and which trail the scout led them by, Doc Driggs was sure to cut across and head them off by laying an ambush.

Whatever his vices were, Doc Driggs had the virtue of persistency, of always turning up smiling for the next blow.

Whether he was really the leader or not, he was certainly a man that would not be downed, and his plans were laid well, and always with a loophole of escape.

If his true courage was doubted, he yet was trusted and his men followed his lead unhesitatingly in the field, no matter who might be the chief in the secret to plan it all.

When he had escaped from the coach, with his two companions, and gone off with the gold on the three team horses, Doc Driggs felt that he had accomplished wonders, gained a triumph in the face of defeat, and he had.

He took the trail for some secret rendezvous, and he had cunningly thrown pursuit off the track when they came to the crossing of the streams.

Expecting that the non-arrival of the coach at the fort, after being hours overdue, would cause a search party to be sent out for it, he supposed that it would be found where he had left it, with the driver dead, and that it would then be taken in and a report made.

This done a search party for him would be sent out, he argued, but as he had gained so long a start, he did not think his trail could be found and followed, even by Buffalo Bill.

Still he did not neglect to hide his trail at the stream crossing, and then push on for the rendezvous he had in view.

That rendezvous was the camp which Buffalo Bill had aimed for while following the outlaws' trail.

It was a secluded little retreat where wood, water, and grass were plentiful, and from which half a dozen canyons led, and trails ran up into the mountains by which to escape should the pursuit track them there.

There had Doc Driggs often of late made his retreat, and there met his allies and comrades when he looked for news or wanted men for a blow at the coaches, gold trains, or emigrants and pony riders, for all who had money or booty fell under the ban of the outlaw raiders.

As the three escaped outlaws and successful robbers came in sight of the retreat, Doc Driggs saw that some one was there before him.

A second glance showed him who it was, for he said: "Pards, there is the chief, and you bet we is lucky ter git away and crib Doc Dawson's gold."

"So we is."

"I'm a thinking we is in luck," were the answers of the two men, and all seemed to stand in wholesome awe of their chief, whoever he was.

As they drew nearer their eyes fell upon the one whom Doc Driggs had recognized as their chief.

He sat upon his horse as though he had just arrived, and was awaiting them.

But neither man nor horse was hardly more than visible in outline.

The animal was covered from head to foot with a green cloth that concealed head, ears, and body, holes for eyes and nostrils alone being cut in it.

The cloth covered the saddle and bridle as well, the rein passing through holes in it.

The rider was also enveloped in a green domino, with a cowl over the head, serving as a complete mask.

All that could be made out was that the horse and his rider were both large in stature.

If the rider was armed no weapon was visible, and only through the holes in his cowl-mask could his eyes be seen.

"I am here in time, Driggs, so what have you to report?" said the masked chief, in a low, deep voice, that had a dangerous ring to it.

"A great deal, captain, for I has had both bad luck and good."

"Out with it then, for I have business calling me elsewhere, and I heard in the mines that you had made a bad break in your work, which was all well planned for you."

"If you cannot execute what I plan, I must find another lieutenant who can," and the masked outlaw leader spoke sternly.

CHAPTER XV.

THE OUTLAW LIEUTENANT'S REPORT.

With no show of ill will at the remark of the unknown leader, to put another man in his place, Doc Driggs said:

"I has ter report, sir, that with six men, I took a stand on the Overland trail to catch the coach of Buck Dawson on its run through westward, as you ordered me ter do."

"Well?"

"We seen a horseman coming, so either had ter rope him, or give up the ambush, and I decided ter nail him."

"But he escaped you?"

"No, sir, we roped him, and he had considerable money with him, a good horse, and outfit."

"You have all?"

"No, sir, fer he had a pard, too, that were behind on ther trail, must have seen our work, so chipped in and kilt Sam——"

"I don't care who he killed, only if he rescued his pard?"

"No, sir, he didn't, but he got in another shot that wounded——"

"All right, and rescued his friend?"

"No, sir, we chased him off, and was about ter hang his pard, when up comes Buffalo Bill."

"Ha; the chief of army scouts!"

"Yes, sir."

"That settled it, for, of course, he received the prisoner and got back the booty."

"We had ter yield ter Buffalo Bill, sir, fer you knows what he is."

"And he was alone?"

"No, sir, he had the pard of our prisoner with him, and we give up all, and they went on ther trail, while we laid fer ther coach."

"And got it and its booty?"

"No, sir, we got ther devil, fer Buffalo Bill had cut around with them two kids, got inter ther coach, and you bet we jist got lead instead of gold."

"You always will when you buck against Buffalo Bill."

"But I do not blame you so much, when he is your foe, and plays the game against you."

"But what else?"

"We could only lay fer the coach on its way back, and which you had told me would carry out a big sum in yellow metal."

"Did you get it?"

"We has the gold, yes, sir."

"Well?"

"We, me and three others, jist played miners going home, got aboard ther coach and laid out ter hold up Buck Dawson at a certain point on ther trail."

"And did?"

"No, sir, we were held up, fer Buffalo Bill and them two kids was met, Buck sung out that we was bad medicine, and they jist pulled off our disguises and hed us tied up in no time."

"And then?"

"We were sent to ther fort with Buck Dawson in charge."

"What then?"

"We didn't go."

"Why not?"

"Well, cap'n, I has small hands and I jist slipped 'em free of ther lariat thet tied me, let ther other fellers go, and so held up Buck Dawson, fer I hed saved a small Derringer hidden in this secret pocket in my britches leg, yer see, sir."

"You are not so bad after all, Driggs."

"Thank yer, sir."

"Go on."

"We hed ter kill Buck Dawson, fer he's a bad one, as you know."

"Yes, and a good one in his way, too, as I also know."

"I am sorry you killed him."

"Had ter, sir, fer I only had ther Derringer, and he got his guns ready and was a hard one ter down, for he got one of us."

"The band is getting thinned out."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, continue."

"We left Buck Dawson dead, sir, tuk ther three horses from his team, and——"

"And the gold?"

"He had it aboard, sir, and you bet we got it."

"And have it?"

"Yes, sir, it's all here, and heavy enough ter be a fortune."

"I know jist the sum it is in uncoined gold."

"Yes, sir, it's all here."

"And I suppose you have left a trail which Buffalo Bill and his kids, as you call them, can readily follow?"

"No, cap'n, we covered up our tracks that thet ther dog they has can't follow, sir."

"They have a dog, then?"

"It's ther dog thet Hart, the Midnight Mail Rider, had, sir, and which Buck Dawson took."

"Ah, yes."

"He must hev give ther dog ter Buffalo Bill, and ther Mail Rider's horses to ther kids, for they is riding them."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is strange; but perhaps Buck Dawson sold them to the boys, though he refused big prices when offered them by others."

"I know he did, sir."

"Well, you have not done badly, Doc, and I'll overlook your first mistake, and tell you just what I wish you to do with the gold, for I must go my way at once."

"Let me tell you also that there are some half a dozen more of the men coming to this camp along the valley trail, for I ordered them here."

"Yes, sir."

"And there is more work for you to do, and which I will explain to you privately, only let me say now before you all that Judge Doom is off on one of his lone trails, so you must be on the watch, while you may expect Buffalo Bill to be on your track after the robbery of the coach and killing of Buck Dawson, the best man of the Overland, and the most popular one, too."

"But we covered up our tracks well, cap'n."

"Buffalo Bill is not a man you can throw off a track, mark my words; but you won't be here when he comes."

"Now a word apart with you, Driggs," and the two rode aside and began conversing together in a low, earnest tone.

CHAPTER XVI.

APPROACHING THE DEATH-TRAP.

So much had Buffalo Bill had to do with the cunning and cleverness in wickedness of the frontier out-

laws that he had made them a study as he had the Indian and his ways.

He knew that there were very able men among the lawless element of the border, men who would have made a name for themselves as soldiers and in other honest professions.

Thwarted in one way, these men would turn to another plan, plot out another scheme, to gain their end, and there was no one who appeared to be more clever at this work than was Doc Driggs.

If he did have a leader behind him, he certainly executed the plan of campaign well.

The man's courage might be doubted, his daring of action, yet, still, he would make up in cunning and determination what he lacked in bravery.

When Buffalo Bill, therefore, took in the situation, of how Judge Doom had gotten possession of the gold taken from the coach, and knew that the man Loper had come back alone to get possession of it for himself, he made up his mind that Doc Driggs was playing a double game.

He half believed that Doc Driggs was in league with Loper, but had, after giving him time to assassinate the judge and get the gold, gone with the men whom he had met on the trail to get back the treasure, should his ally have failed.

Foiled in this by the two young Texans, and with the loss of two of his men, Doc Driggs would, in the scout's mind, be but that more determined to regain possession of that gold.

Knowing the country most thoroughly, as he certainly did, and aware that it was Buffalo Bill who had recaptured the gold bags, Doc Driggs would feel certain that it would be taken at once to the fort by the scout.

So Doc Driggs argued, as the scout believed, and hence it was that the latter managed to be held up on the way or ambushed.

This Buffalo Bill, with his boy parads, had prepared for, as has been seen.

Whether Doc Driggs would have more men with him than those he had escaped with from the fire of the boy sure-shots, Buffalo Bill could only conjecture; but if he had three, including himself, and fired from an ambush, they would be one each for himself and two youths.

Knowing the country as he did, Buffalo Bill could readily place just the point of ambush, as he felt sure that Doc Driggs would take down the valley to reach the Overland trail and would seek the very spot for an ambush and then lie in wait until the scout came along with the recaptured treasure.

When they were drawing nigh to this place the scout had decided which would be Doc Driggs' selection of an ambush, and he called back:

"We are nearing one of the two places he will select, if he has done as I believe he has.

"You know just what to do, boy parads, so I need say no more.

"Remember, however, not to kill Doc Driggs if you can help doing so, for he is too valuable a man to be shot—he must hang."

The boys made an appropriate reply in a low tone, and on they rode in silence.

"Here!" said the scout in a whisper, as they ascended a hill to the summit.

The trail led over the ridge there, and among bowlders and dwarf pines that gave a fine shelter to ambushers.

But all was as silent as death there, and a deer suddenly bounded away before them, having evidently been asleep and just aroused by their presence.

"That is proof positive that there are no outlaws in ambush at this place, or that deer would never have been here," called back Buffalo Bill, no longer speaking in a subdued tone.

"How far is it to the next place, sir?" asked Harold Hart.

"About two miles, and Doc Driggs is really most likely to be there, as, now I come to think of it, the outlaws would have more time to get into position, and it is really more desirable every way."

"For them?"

"Apparently for them, for the shelter is better, but really for us, for we can from the direction we come command the position and drive them out."

"I only hope they will be there, Mr. Cody, for we are steadily thinning out the band."

"Yes, Len, but there are plenty more of the same kind of material in this country for the leaders to draw upon.

"It is the chief and his lieutenants that we must capture, and then the band will quickly disperse.

"Be on your guard now, boys," and no more was said as they approached the second place of ambush which the scout had decided the outlaws would select.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SCOUT'S FATAL FOIL.

As the three horses in the lead, carrying their dummy riders, reached the place of ambush, as decided by Buffalo Bill, the latter and his boy sure-shots lay low upon the backs of the animals they rode, to appear to resemble pack-saddles.

This place also was a hilltop, and it was heavily timbered along the summit.

The trail led up from the valley, turned on the ridge and ran along it for a considerable distance.

Just when the trail reached the summit there were groups of rocks of large size, but no trees.

Further on the trees began, and were the outlaws in ambush there, then they were among the rocks and had left their horses among the timber in hiding.

From the rocks they could see by the starlight the party coming along the valley and then up the hill.

The horsemen approached at a walk, the animal of Buffalo Bill leading the way.

The three dummy riders swayed in their saddles like men who were worn out and had gone to sleep.

The three real riders were prostrate upon the backs of their horses, looking like packs strapped on the animals.

It would take very close observation to see that the leader was not Buffalo Bill in that mountain light.

As the party reached the foot of the hill, Deathgrip, who had been trotting by the side of Harold Hart, gave a low growl.

"They are there, for that is Deathgrip's warning," whispered the scout.

"All right, sir," came in a whisper from each youth.

Again Deathgrip gave a growl, and then another.

Even in that light he could be seen to bristle up savagely and show his teeth.

"All right, Deathgrip. Keep quiet!" said Buffalo Bill.

This told the intelligent dog that his warning growls were heeded, and he trotted silently along once more.

Up the hill trail they began to mount, the dummies swaying wildly, as though they were riders fast asleep.

Nearer and nearer to the top of the ridge they drew, until, when Buffalo Bill's horse was among the boulders, there suddenly blazed out half a dozen bright flashes, as many reports were heard, and six bullets went tearing through the dummy riders.

Lying upon his horse as he was, Buffalo Bill had his rifle at a level, and with the flash of the weapons from over the rocks, he also fired and a death cry followed.

Then as he slipped from his horse and sprang to the shelter of the rocks, he heard the report of the shotgun barrel loaded with bullets, fired by Len Ashley, and the sharp crack of Harold Hart's rifle.

None knew better than did the scout that Doc Driggs had gotten more men to him in the ambush.

He had counted half a dozen shots, he was sure, and, knowing, even if he had killed his man, and he was pretty sure that he had, that they had big odds to fight, he played a game of clever strategy to help them out, for he shouted:

"Boys, they have shot the dummies full of holes, so now all of you show yourselves and at them!"

He gave a yell, as also did the two Texans, and they sounded as though half a dozen men were hidden among the horses, which had come to a halt and stood the firing without stampeding.

But just then Doc Driggs had shown a caution that had often given his men cause to doubt his courage.

He would never hold on against a surprise, never stand and fight it out, even with even numbers.

He would rather run off and leave his turn of luck for another day than take chances of capture and death then.

The moment that he had given the order to his half dozen followers, whom he had met and done just what Buffalo Bill had anticipated he would do, to fire two each at the supposed three horsemen, he realized that they were trapped, that they had fired upon mock riders.

He had fired his revolver at the leader, feeling sure that the two rifles and his shot would surely bring down the mighty and invincible scout.

But with the scout's return fire, which killed the man by his side, the shower of bullets from the shotgun barrel of Len Ashley's weapon, and which seemed to come from a dozen men, and wounded two of the gang, Doc Driggs lost no time in meditation, but bounded over the ridge and sped away like a deer, calling upon the others to follow him.

Three of them did so, but three did not.

Those who did not had started upon their last trail, or rather, one had, and two were fatally wounded.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DYING OUTLAW.

Buffalo Bill was too good a general to let his enemy see his weakness.

Did he and the two boys dash out from among the rocks the outlaws would see them as distinctly as they did the fugitives.

"Don't fire, boys, for we do not know which one may be Doc Driggs," called out the scout to the boys, and then in a loud tone he shouted:

"Come on with your cavalry, Captain Evans, and you can capture the outfit."

It seemed that the four flying forms seemed to double their pace at hearing this, and, anxious to keep them going at the same pace, Buffalo Bill said:

"I will open with my repeating rifle, Len, and you turn loose your arsenal again, and they will think a whole troop is firing, but aim low, for Doc Driggs must not be shot."

The shotgun sent its shower of bullets as the repeating rifle rattled, and the fugitives sped along like frightened deer.

"There they go, captain!"

"Your men can catch them, sir," shouted the scout, and cheers were given just as the speeding outlaws disappeared in the darkness of the timber further along the top of the ridge.

"Pards, it was a success," cried the scout, as he began to lead the horses up to the top of the hill.

"It was a most fatal foil to their trap, you see, sir," cried Harold.

"You remain here and dismount the dummies as soon as you have looked to those poor fellows groaning there, and I will scout along on foot with Deathgrip to see if they have left any horses and gone in earnest," said Buffalo Bill.

He went off as he spoke, the dog at his side, and

soon disappeared toward the timber, and there the boys heard the rattle of his rifle, followed by his warcry and loud commands.

This told them that he was simply pushing the fugitives along.

Harold and Len approached the two men, whose groans touched their hearts.

The battle was over then, and they could be merciful to those who a moment before had sought to kill them.

"My poor fellow, can I help you?"

"Who are you?" came with a gasp.

"My name is Harold Hart, if it will do you any good to know," was the reply, in a kindly tone.

The effect was startling, for the wounded man gave a shriek that checked the groaning of his dying pard near.

"No, no; you are not Harold Hart, for he is dead; I helped kill him, and the grave does not give up its dead.

"No, no, no; I have always said that the dead cannot come back to life. You are not Harold Hart!"

The words were pitiful, and though the lips that confessed that he was one of the murderers of the Midnight Mail Rider, the young Texan replied in the same gentle way:

"I am not Harold Hart the Mail Rider, but his son and namesake.

"I came here to find my father and found him dead, murdered, and his body thrown into a cavern."

"I helped do it, and I knew that the dead would not come back.

"I knew him well, and your voice, your size, are the same as the Mail Rider's.

"Yes, you must be his son."

"Why did you murder my poor father?"

"I had to."

"Why?"

"I had my orders."

"Who from?"

"God knows, for none of us do save Doc Driggs."

"He knows?"

"Yes."

"You refer to your secret leader?"

"Yes."

"No one save Doc Driggs knows who he is?"

"No."

"Do you not suspect?"

"No."

"You know nothing about him?"

"Only that he plans the work and Doc Driggs carries it out."

"Why did he kill my father?"

"For that which all men and women sin for—gold."

"To rob him?"

"Yes."

"But there was no need to kill him."

"Did you know your father?"

"Oh, yes, and he was a noble man."

"That he was, and a brave one.

"I knew him years ago; but he was not a man to submit to robbery, and he resisted against big odds, killed two of our band, and fought until his dog fell and he was too weak to do more, for his horse had escaped and run off.

"But we got the mail bags and it was a big haul.

"That is the story, Harold Hart, of how your father died, and often has his cruel death haunted me, for I was from Texas and I knew him well, poor man."

"You are from Texas?"

"Yes."

"What is your name?"

"I will not tell you," was the faint reply.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CONFESSION.

"I will not seek to know what you do not care to tell; but, come, let me see if I can help you, for I have neglected it too long, and your wound may not be mortal."

"It is, I feel certain.

"Yes, it must be."

"Do you wish to die?"

"If I live now it will be to end my life upon the gallows."

"I am sorry for you."

"Sorry for the man who helped kill your father?"

"Yes, for men seldom intend to go wrong, and circumstances make them do so oftener than a deliberate intention to sin."

"You are like your father, for he was one to look kindly on all who went wrong.

"Why, time and again he had argued with me, telling me to give up my evil life, but all to no purpose, and now you see the end."

"Yes, I fear your wound is fatal," said Harold, as he examined the wound as well as he could.

"I hope so.

"But do you know who killed me?"

"No."

"You did."

"I?"

"Yes, you were on the gray horse."

"Yes."

"You fired at me, and then leaped off your horse and ran to that rock yonder."

"I am sorry."

"It is justice, for I fired upon your father also; I was one of those who did, but it was because he would have killed me in the fight, not knowing me then in the darkness.

"Others fired also, and Doc Driggs was one, and Brassy was the other, for he was shot three times."

"Three times?"

"Yes, and knifed also, while Doc Driggs also hit him over the head with a revolver.

"He fought hard and was game to the last."

"Doc Driggs and Brassy were the others who fired the fatal shots at my father?"

"Yes."

"Doc Driggs led you to-night?"

"Yes, but got away, as he always does."

"And Brassy?"

"He was along to-night also, but got away, for he is lucky, too, but I am not."

"Doc Driggs and Brassy," said Harold Hart, as though thinking aloud.

"Yes," murmured the man.

"You have given me my death wound; but to avenge your good father Doc Driggs and Brassy must also die."

"I shall not forget," was the stern reply.

Then Harold turned to Len Ashley, who had been for some time a listener to what had been said and asked:

"What about the other wounded man, Len?"

"He died a moment after I got to him."

"You have heard what this man has said?"

"Yes."

"He is dying, Len, and is a Texan."

"Yes."

"He knew my father, was once his friend, and I wish to in some way help him, but he will not tell me his name."

"So I heard, so let it go."

"No, for he may have some one dear to him whom he would like to send a parting word to, and I would be glad to carry out his last wishes."

"Would you?"

"Indeed I would if in my power."

"Could you tell that I was dead, and yet not tell how I died?"

"Yes, indeed?"

"And your pard, there?"

"Would also keep your secret."

"What is his name?"

"Leonard Ashley."

The man gave a start and asked:

"Son of the ranchero of Sunset Ranch?"

"Yes."

"I knew him, though I have been long years from Texas."

"Have you any kindred there?"

"Yes."

"Some whom you love?"

"Yes."

"And who love you?"

"Yes, oh yes."

"I have been a bad man, but they do not know it, though they believe I have been only unfortunate in my business."

"You see, they have helped me time and again, and begged me to come home and live with them."

"But I had gone to the bad, you see, got worse and worse."

"Harold Hart, your father recognized me, but he was true as steel and never told on me, and tried hard to get me to reform."

"We will keep your secret, too!"

"How will you tell that I died?"

"Shot in a fight with outlaws."

"That will be true, and say that you heard my last words?"

"Yes."

"That I had nothing to leave, had still been unfortunate?"

"Yes."

"I believe I will trust you, and quick, for I am growing very faint."

"Take this."

Harold gave him a drink from his canteen, and, partially revived, the man said:

"I am that boy's uncle, for his mother is my sister, Ranchero Ashley's husband."

"Now you know."

"Yes, and Len Ashley has with him money he brought from his father to give to you to help you."

"I half suspected who you were when you said you were a Texan."

"And you will not tell those who love me and believe me true, just what I am?"

"Never!"

"You swear it?"

"Indeed, I do."

"And you, Len?"

Len Ashley had knelt by the side of the dying man and tenderly grasped his hand.

At his question, uttered in a voice that was hardly audible, the youth replied:

"No, no, mother and father shall never know that you were other than they believed."

"God bless you, and——"

The words ended, and the breathing of the man became harder and harder until, with a gasp and shudder, life ended.

"Poor fellow!"

The boys started, for by their side almost stood Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER XX.

THE OUTLAW'S LAST CARD.

"A sad end, boy pards," said Buffalo Bill, feelingly.

He had approached unseen, and so had heard much that had passed without intending to do so.

"Yes, sir, very sad, and only to think he was the man we wished to find and urge to return home."

"I have seen many such deaths out here, pards, and of men who would have been ornaments to society had they not gone wrong."

"But his secret must be kept, as you promised, and

those who cared for him need never know that he was other than they believed.

"I have many such secrets locked in my breast, never to be revealed.

"But we must get a move on us, for there is much to be done yet."

"The outlaws escaped, then, sir?"

"Those who do not remain here did."

"And Doc Driggs?"

"Had his usual good luck, but he will turn up again, and soon, for he must redeem himself, so look out for his next blow."

"When and where will that be, sir?"

"Perhaps to-night when the coach comes along."

"So soon?"

"Yes, he is a smooth one and no mistake."

"I should like to give this man decent burial, sir, for my mother's sake," said Len Ashley.

"Certainly. I hold no ill will toward the dead, and we will bury the three bodies, your kinsman, however, apart from the others.

"We will get right to work, and be ready for the coach when it comes along, for Deathgrip can stand guard."

The dog was accordingly placed on guard some little distance from the scene of the attack, and then Buffalo Bill built a fire and the three dead bodies were placed together, wrapped in their blankets.

"It was an easy matter to find gravelike crevices in the rocks, and into these were the bodies placed, two in one and that of the erring uncle of Len Ashley by himself.

Dirt and logs were put over them, and they had just completed their task when the rumble of coming wheels was heard.

All the while the three pards were at work the dog had been on guard, though he had been very nervous, and several times had come up to his young master and whined.

"He wants to tell us something, and I believe I can guess it," said the scout.

"Yes, he runs up to me and goes back again in a very strange way," responded Harold Hart.

"That means that the band have not wholly left us, but we shall hear of them again.

"Being forewarned is being forearmed, so we will be prepared for Doc Driggs' next move," said Buffalo Bill.

The scout in his search after the outlaws in the timber had found the horses of the three who had been killed and led them back with him, placing them with the others before joining the two youths and the dying man.

He now decided upon meeting the next plot of Doc Driggs with more strategy, so said:

"I feel sure that we will be attacked, or rather the coach will, for if there has not been a spy upon us

here I am greatly mistaken, for Deathgrip has proved that much to us by his actions."

"You think one of the outlaws has been watching then, sir."

"Yes, Harold, for the large sum we carry in gold will not be given up without another effort to take it from us.

"Doc Driggs knows that the coach is due about this time, and he will expect us to escort it on to the fort, or, perhaps, not looking for further trouble from him, to send it on with the driver, while we keep his trail."

"Mr. Cody, you seem to know just what these men will do," said Harold.

"It's a guess, you know, yet may be a good one; but it is worth plotting against," was the answer of the scout, and after a moment he continued:

"We will bring our dummies into use again, at least two of them, and I'll tell you my plan."

The two boys were all attention to hear it, and Buffalo Bill continued:

"I will slip away back on the trail, halt Ad Wilson, the driver, and tell him the situation.

"Then I will ride back with him in the coach, and so be here to halt him in a loud voice, that the spy, if there is one, can hear, after which we will discuss the plan I have in view.

"But you, Harold, I wish to remain here to play the part of the three of us, aided by two of the dummies, while Len and I secretly go on in the coach.

"You must follow at a short distance behind the coach, Harold, and when you are needed come on quickly with your bogus riders and lend what aid you can."

"I will, sir, and I believe your plan will again thwart the outlaws, clever as Doc Driggs is in his schemes," said Harold, while Len remarked:

"My! But it is an exciting life one lives out here.

"I thought there were lively times in Texas, but this country beats it from start to finish."

"Now, boy pards, I'll start back on the trail to meet the coach," and so silently did Buffalo Bill glide away that Len remarked:

"He moves like a ghost."

CHAPTER XXI.

BUFFALO BILL'S DESPERATE STRATEGY.

Ad Wilson, the driver of the coach in the place of Buck Dawson, was going along with his team in a slow walk, as the ridge was reached over which the trail ran.

Suddenly he started, and then muttered:

"My God! That sounds like a death warning, for I distinctly heard my name called."

Again came the call, and it was in a loud whisper, from the woods upon one side and close at hand.

"Halt, Ad, for I wish to talk with you.

"I am Buffalo Bill."

Involuntarily the driver drew his team to a halt, though with fear and trembling.

"Is it so—is it a warning?" he asked in a voice that showed nervousness.

"It is all right, Ad.

"Dismount as though you were repairing your harness, so I can talk with you.

"I am Buffalo Bill."

Reassured now, the driver said:

"Darn that harness, it's broke again—whoa!"

With this he got down from his box and Buffalo Bill stood close to his side.

"Ad, we are on the trail of the road-agents, and have had several fights with them one-half a mile ahead on the ridge.

"We got three of them, but I feel sure they are spying to see if we send the gold on with you, for we have recaptured what they took from Buck Dawson."

"Good for you, Buffalo Bill, and it's just like you.

"How many of your scouts are with you?"

"None, I have but two boy pards, but they are enough."

"I heard of them at the fort, and you know best.

"Count me in to help you."

"Well, I'll slip into the coach, and when you reach the place I'll get out, call to you to halt, and explain what I wish in a loud tone, so if they have any spy watching he can hear and run on with the news to his pards."

"That's all right."

"Then I will get into the coach, with one of my boy pards, and be with you when we are needed."

"That's fine."

"And my other young comrade will follow in time to lend a helping hand."

"Good again."

"All this may be for nothing, but I believe that my suspicion is right, and it is best to be prepared, Ad."

"Every time."

After a few words more Buffalo Bill slipped into the coach. Ad Wilson remounted to his box and drove on once more, his mind greatly relieved to feel that he had the scout and his boy pards to protect him.

As he neared the spot where his young pards were awaiting him, Buffalo Bill slipped out of the coach and gliding among the rocks got ahead on the trail, while he called out:

"Ho, Ad Wilson, halt, old man; for I have news for you!"

The coach came to a standstill, and the driver innocently asked:

"Who are you, for it's down-grade work halting on this trail."

"I am Buffalo Bill; I thought you would recognize my voice, Ad."

"All right, Pard Cody; I do now."

"Anything gone wrong?"

"Yes, we were fired on here by road-agents, but we had planned to block their game, and got three of them.

"The rest have gone as though the devil was after them and will lie mighty low now for a time."

"That's good.

"They deserved all they got."

"I want you to take their horses, three of them, on to the fort with you, and report the affair to Colonel Ramsey, telling him we missed here a trio of them."

"I'll do it."

"And I'll give you a valuable freight to carry on, too, Ad, the same that got poor Buck Dawson into trouble."

"You order, Pard Cody, and I'll obey.

"But won't you go along, too?"

"You see, I wish to pick up the trail of those fellows when day dawns, for it is time they were run to their lair."

"That's so, and you'll run them there if anybody can.

"Where is the dust?"

"In bags on my pack-horse."

"Who have you along?"

"Two boy pards, and they can't be beat."

"Well, give the word and I'll do as you say."

This conversation was carried on in rather a loud tone, and all the while Deathgrip was on guard over in the timber where the outlaws had disappeared their fight.

The gold bags were handed up to the driver, and the horses with the dummy riders were kept in the background.

Then the three animals taken from the outlaws were hitched to the rear of the coach and Buffalo Bill and Len Ashley slipped inside, leaving Harold Hart a short distance back among the rocks with the two mounted dummies.

Calling out good-by to the driver, Buffalo Bill added that he should have no fear, as the outlaws would trouble him no more.

Then the scout and Len settled in silence back upon the seats, while Harold, mounting his horse, with the other animals in lead, among them the pack-horse, started to ride back over the trail.

But he only went a short distance, when he turned and followed on after the coach.

CHAPTER XXII.

DOC DRIGGS IN AMBUSH.

The coach rolled on its way over the dark trail, Ad Wilson skillfully handling his team, while, well acquainted with the way, he knew just what was before him in the way of rugged driving.

But Ad's thoughts were as busy as his hands, and he was anxiously awaiting the hold-up, which he now felt most certainly would occur.

Buffalo Bill had suggested to him several points where he might expect it, and had shown him that the laws would not wish to go any nearer to the fort than they had to.

Then he had stated how easy it would have been for one of the men, who knew the locality of the last find-up, to make his way along the ridge to within striking distance of what took place there, and then, turning what would be done, to quickly make the descent of the rugged hill to the valley through which the coach must go, and where he could join his comrades by a walk of half a mile, while Ad Wilson would have several miles to cover in reaching the same spot following around the regular road.

It was Buffalo Bill's knowledge of the locality that enabled him to guess what the outlaws would do, if they believed that the gold would be sent on in Ad Wilson's care to the fort.

Again it was only surmise with the scout, yet he was very exact in his surmises, and having arranged to thwart the outlaws, both Ad Wilson and Len Ashley felt morally sure that the hold-up would come.

The driver was naturally most anxious, as, without a moment of warning, he might be greeted with a shot that would hurl him down from his box.

But they were brave men, these Overland stage drivers, and Ad Wilson philosophically remarked to himself as he drove along:

"If I go under, Buffalo Bill and his kid comrades will avenge me."

Hardly had he thus comforted himself when from the side of the trail flashed a shot that momentarily illumined the darkness.

The two rifles were both aimed at the same object, the head of Ad Wilson, the philosophical driver.

They had been the summons to halt.

The outlaws were in earnest now.

They would waste no words, not one.

If Buck Dawson was dead, Ad Wilson should follow him quickly.

There was a fortune at stake, and Doc Driggs had before gotten possession of it and then lost it.

He would take no more chances, but get the gold at all hazards.

He must redeem himself in the eyes of the unknown left.

He must get the better of Buffalo Bill, and, reckoned as his force of outlaws was to himself and four men, he would show that he was a match for the great scout.

Just what Buffalo Bill had supposed he would do, Doc Driggs had done.

He had fled, when he believed cavalry were after him, realized quickly that it was one of Buffalo Bill's old bluffs, halted his men, and selecting one who knew every inch of the trail had told him to go back a foot, under the slope of the ridge, and find out just what force was there and what was to be done.

Fortunately for the man, he had the wind in his favor, blowing toward him, so that Deathgrip did not discover how near he was or there would have been another dead man to bury then and there.

But his presence rendered the dog very nervous, though he could not place his exact locality.

Learning what he could, the man, Brassy by name, slid down the steep hill to the valley, met there Doc Driggs and the other two outlaws, and made his report.

"Just what I had an idee that Buffalo Bill would do, send ther gold on by ther coach and remain ter take our trail when ther sun rose.

"But I guesses we can make a play that will trump his little game, for we shoots Ad Wilson and gets that gold, and you bet we'll keep it next time," was the comment of Doc Driggs, and then he led the way ahead on the trail to select the place of ambush to play his trump card for the gold that had already cost so much of life and suffering.

Doc Driggs was determined now to know no failure.

He seemed to feel that fortune was in his grasp, luck was coming his way, and he would take no chances.

To kill was nothing to him, for already was his life condemned to the gallows by a number of red deeds.

The driver should die, the gold should be taken, and then to escape Buffalo Bill every energy would be bent.

With this determination, Doc Driggs put his men in position and awaited for the coming coach.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WIPE-OUT.

At the whispered command of their leader, two of the outlaws pulled trigger.

They had been ordered to aim at the head and body of the driver and aim to kill.

They had obeyed in their aiming, fired their rifles, and their bullets had gone straight.

Ad Wilson had gotten just the challenge he had feared, a shot instead of a word to halt.

He fell back on the coach and lay motionless.

At the same time the two men who had fired dropped their rifles and sprang to the bits of the leaders.

Each grasped a leader and the coach was at a standstill.

Then Doc Driggs and the other road-agent stepped toward the coach, revolvers in hand, but from habit, not fear then, as they did not anticipate any trouble.

"I guesses ther gold is in ther coach, pard, so we'll look in first," said Doc Driggs.

He opened the door as he spoke to find his throat in a grip of iron.

He was dragged half into the coach, and one or two heavy blows from Buffalo Bill's fist fell full in his face, stunning him completely.

At the same moment Len Ashley shot over the

scout's head, and down dropped the man just behind Doc Driggs.

With a bound the two men at the head of the leaders started for cover, firing at random as they ran.

But a shot came from the box and an outlaw fell.

The remaining man of the four turned as if bewildered, ran up the trail, and darted into the timber.

There he leaped upon the first horse he came to, made a quick flank movement, and regained the trail and dashed right upon Harold Hart, and, as he supposed, two others.

"Halt! hands up!" shouted Harold.

The man was desperate now, and he fired his revolver full at the youth.

The bullet cut through the fleshy part of his arm.

Dashing spurs into his horse, the maddened and terrified outlaw tried to rush by Harold, when the youth, whose revolver had been knocked from his right hand by the shock of the wound, had drawn a second weapon in his left, and sent a bullet into the head of the horse, almost upon him.

Down went the animal, throwing his rider hard, but ere the dazed outlaw could spring to his feet the youth had slipped from his horse and had his revolver muzzle pressed hard in his face.

"Surrender, or I will kill you without mercy!" was the stern demand.

"If I have to, I have to," was the sullen reply.

"Hold your hands above your head!"

"They is up."

"Now turn your back to me!"

It was done, and the youth ran his knife through the leathern belt, letting the weapon drop to the ground.

"Ho, Harold, need any help?" cried Len Ashley as he came running to the scene.

"Only to tie this fellow, Len."

"I'll do it with pleasure, you bet!" and running to the fallen horse of the outlaw, Len got the stake rope and soon had the man securely bound.

"All well with the coach, Len?"

"Oh, yes, and we got Doc Driggs alive, and this man is Brassy, of whom you have been told!"

"Good."

"Then we have the two I wanted most."

"Buffalo Bill thinks we have got the whole gang now, save the unknown chief."

"I hope so."

"But no one was hurt, the scout or you?"

"No, but Ad Wilson had the closest of calls, for he was fired upon without warning, and one bullet gave him a scalp wound, knocking him silly for a few seconds, and the other struck his pipe in his side pocket and glanced, only giving him a rude shock."

"I am glad, indeed, it is no worse."

"Yes, but he was soon out for bear, and got one of the outlaws as they skipped off."

"How many were there?"

"Just four."

"And you can account for three?"

"Yes."

"Doc Driggs, too?"

"Oh, yes."

"There is no mistake?"

"Not any."

"That is good news, for the scout was so anxious to catch him alive."

"Well, he did, for when he stuck his nose into the coach to look up the gold he was grasped by the throat by Buffalo Bill, and felt the weight of two drives of the latter's fist that put him to sleep for a minute."

"But he is not badly hurt?"

"Oh, no."

"And the other man?"

"I got him, Harold, as he came up with Doc Driggs."

"Then with this man all are present or accounted for?"

"Yes."

"At least so Doc Driggs told Buffalo Bill, and he said the man who had escaped, this one here who didn't, you know, was named Brassy."

"That settles it, Len, and the scout has kept his pledge to us, but that unknown chief must also be run down."

"That is what Buffalo Bill just said, and that means he will be; but he hopes to make Doc Driggs give the unknown chief away."

"I wonder if he will."

"It is to be hoped so; but, come, let us go back to the coach with your prisoner."

"I'll bring the horses."

The dead horse of the outlaw was stripped of saddle and bridle by Len, and then the two pards started with the other animals and the prisoner to join the scout, Harold Hart for the first time making known to his friend that he was wounded.

"I got a bullet in the arm, Len, and it is bleeding rather too freely," he said.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TELL-TALE NOTE.

Buffalo Bill was found with Doc Driggs and the driver.

The outlaw leader was bound hand and foot, and a fire having been built by the trail, his face showed the severity of the scout's blows.

The villain looked really a pitiable object, and sat on a rock with downcast appearance generally.

The driver had made a most wonderful double escape from instant death. But for his large pipe worn in a pocket on his left side the bullet that glanced would have entered his breast.

The other bullet had struck a gold pin which held up the rim of his hat, mashed it and, cutting through

he felt, had made a wound in the scalp. It was another marvelous escape.

But Buffalo Bill, ascertaining that neither shot had caused any real damage, brought up the two dead outlaws and placed them near the firelight, just as Len returned with Harold and the prisoner, leading the horses.

"Mr. Cody, Harold got his man, but I fear he is badly wounded," called out Len, anxiously.

In an instant the scout was by the side of the youth, his coat was drawn off, the shirt-sleeve opened and the wound exposed.

"Good! It cut its way through, so there will be no robbing," he said.

The long experience of Buffalo Bill with wounds had taught him much, and, as he always carried lint, bandages, and remedies with him, he was not long in getting to work.

"It has bled rather freely, Harold, but is only a flesh wound and is not at all serious. I will fix it up all right and you can go on with Ad Wilson to the fort."

"And you, sir?"

"Well, Len and I will make a search for the last of the band, the unknown chief, and I believe we'll find him after I have had a talk with Doc Driggs."

"No, Mr. Cody, I go with you and Len, if this wound is not serious. I must be in at the finish of this game!" pluckily responded the boy.

"All right! I'd like to have you with us, and if your wound does give you trouble you promise me you will start at once for the fort?"

"Yes, sir, I promise."

"That settles it. Now I'll have a talk with Doc Driggs here, and if he don't tell what I wish to know I will try Brassy."

"Ad, we'll have to detain you a while to wait for your prisoners."

"Don't mention it, chief, for I came near to making this spot my resting-place forevermore," earnestly replied the driver.

Turning then to Doc Driggs Buffalo Bill said:

"See here, Driggs, you are about the worst man in these mines, save one, and, as you are the tool of that one, I am willing to let the buzzard go to catch the eagle, so tell me now who is your unknown chief?"

"You offer me pardon, do you?"

"No; your life."

"How is that?"

"I will give you my pledge that you shall not be hanged, but, instead, be sent to prison for the term of years the court may decide."

"And I am to betray my chief?"

"Yes, that is the price."

"I won't do it."

"Then you'll have to hang!"

"I may, but I am not hanged yet, and the man I call chief will see to it that I do not hang!"

"He may, and he may not! But as you will not tell, I'll give Brassy the chance."

"No, yer don't, Buffalo Bill, fer I don't know who he is."

"You don't know who the unknown chief of your band is?"

"I don't, fer a fact."

"I do not believe you."

"It's thier truth, fer all the orders that come ter us were given by Doc Driggs, and only he knows who the chief is."

"You have never seen him?"

"Yes, but not ter know him, fer he was allers covered up from his head to his feet, and his horse was also the same."

"No, I'd squeal mighty quick ter have my life ef I know'd, fer I hain't stuck on being hanged a little bit, and Doc Briggs is a durned fool ef he don't tell."

"I'll be a durned fool, then, fer I will not tell."

"You mean this, do you?"

"I does, Buffalo Bill, so don't make no mistake; I'll hang before I tell."

"All right! Hang you will, and your unknown chief as well, for I have a clew and I'll root him out, though I can hardly believe I can possibly be on the right track."

"Ad, you must take these prisoners on with you, and I'll see to it that they cannot get free as they did once before with Buck Dawson."

"But, first, I'll search them well. That may give a clew."

At this Doc Driggs turned deathly white. He fairly shook as though seized with sudden terror.

Several times he tried hard to free his hands and to get to his pocket,

Buffalo Bill saw all this, and went on with his search the more interestedly.

He found an inner belt of gold, a watch bearing the initials "H. H.," and a Texan star, which Harold at once recognized as having belonged to his father.

But, better than all, was a sealed envelope, addressed in pencil.

The scout read the address, tore open the envelope and read what was written on the slip of paper within.

He made no comment as to the contents, but remarked:

"Now, Ad, you can go on and report to Colonel Ramsey what has happened, telling him that I start at once with my boy team to the Red Ridge Mining Camp and hope to have another prisoner for him soon."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TRAIL'S END.

Ad Wilson drove on his way, a happy man, just as day began to break.

He had the captured outlaws' horses in lead behind

the coach, and their riders in the vehicle, the two dead men on the front seat, the two living tied securely to the rear.

Doc Driggs and Brassy were both silent as their dead comrades, for despair had settled upon them.

The gold had been taken upon the box, and the driver was congratulating himself upon Buffalo Bill's success and the great victory that he had won with the aid of his two Texan sure-shots.

He also had cause of congratulation over his narrow escape, and therefore he was really in the best of spirits, as he held rein on his way, sending his team along at a rapid gait.

When at last the fort came in sight he breathed with perfect freedom, for he had finished his run in safety, with prisoners and gold.

Almost his first question was as to the condition of his fellow-driver Buck Dawson.

"The surgeon says he's out of danger and all right," was the sergeant's most welcome reply.

Then Ad Wilson gave a whoop of joy and made his way to the colonel's quarters, where he gave up the recaptured gold, his prisoners and the two dead outlaws, with the remark:

"Buffalo Bill and those two dandy kids of his did it all, colonel, saving me in the bargain, for if they hadn't been on hand the agents would have made short work of me, sir.

"It was a clean wipe-out, colonel, save the unknown leader of the gang, and Buffalo Bill told me to say that he and his little Texans are on his trail, and he hopes to have good news for you soon.

"The gold is here, sir, the gang is wiped out, save those to be hanged, Buck Dawson is getting well, and I'm O. K. Shake hands, colonel!"

The colonel shook hands with a will, and the happy driver went to his fellow-driver and told him the good news.

* * * * *

When Ad Wilson had driven on his way, Buffalo Bill had said:

"Boys, we are a pretty tired-out lot of citizens, but we must act now and rest later.

"News travels fast and mysteriously in this country, and we must reach the Red Ridge Mining Camp before it is known that Doc Driggs is captured, for there is a customer there whom I very much want."

"The note you found on Doc Driggs, sir, gave you some information?"

"Yes, Harold, and I have a great surprise for you boys of my aids."

The boys waited until the scout took the note from his pocket and read it aloud.

It was as follows:

"O. T.,

"After midnight,

"Thursday,

"C.:

"Layed for B. B. and 2 B. Got worsted. Will head off C. on O. T. that carries G. and will get it without fail.

"Will send this by special messenger if all goes well.

"Will bring G. to you earliest moment possible.

"Expect good news.

"D. D."

"Now, boy parads, I read this like this:

"Overland Trail,

"After midnight,

"Thursday,

"Chief:

"Layed for Buffalo Bill and two boys. Got worsted. Will head off coach on O. T. that carries G. and will get it without fail.

"Will send this by special messenger if all goes well.

"Will bring gold to you earliest moment possible.

"Expect good news.

"DOC DRIGGS."

"Don't you think that fills the bill, my little sashes?"

"It does, sir; but to whom is the letter addressed?" asked Harold.

"An important question, indeed, my boy; very important.

"It is addressed to Judge Doom, Red Bridge Camp, was the reply.

"But he was the man who returned the gold to us, sir!"

"Yes, but the very man I have had my suspicions of for a long time.

"A fox cannot match him in cunning, and I have been unable up to this time to catch him, as I have now done, I feel sure."

"Surely you do not think he can be the guilty unknown?"

"I feel sure of it, Len. We caught him with that

old, but not knowing how much we knew he just gave it up as a proof of his intended good faith.

"You both heard Doc Driggs remark about Loper, and he had killed the judge?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, there is no doubt but that Loper went back to kill him, and get the gold, and Doc Driggs, meeting other men, returned to the judge."

"Now, my idea is that Doc had met the judge, turned the gold over to him, and left for some purpose."

"But the dead man, sir?"

"Oh! he might have been left with Judge Doom, tried to kill him, but was himself killed."

"That is a small matter, but it is certain that Judge Doom alone knew all the information the road-agents have worked on. The first time I saw him I set him down as a villain, and now I am sure of it. He is our mutton."

"I shall go to Red Ridge and arrest him, and if I am wrong, then I am willing to accept the consequences, whatever they may be."

"That's the talk, chief, and we are with you, sir."

"Indeed, we are, Mr. Cody," and Buffalo Bill well knew that his Texas sure-shots were Texas true hearts! Good reason he took pride in his Texan team!

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONCLUSION.

Judge Doom had the best quarters to be found in the mining camp where he made his home.

He was said to live on the very best the country could supply.

Seated in his quarters, enjoying his after-supper pipe, the judge suddenly beheld Buffalo Bill before him.

"Ah, Cody, a pleasure, indeed!" he exclaimed, with feigned heartiness.

"Thanks, judge. I got this letter on the trail, so brought it to you."

The judge took the envelope, opened it, looked at the note within, glanced up at the scout, and—and found a revolver covering him!

"Ha! Cody, what does this mean?"

"That this time Judge Doom is under sentence of death if he moves or resists!

"You are my prisoner, sir!"

Protests, anger, arguments, were all useless; the judge was a prisoner, and he realized fully what that meant.

His threats of the displeasure of Colonel Ramsey at the scout's act had not the least effect.

He had to go to the fort, and much of a compromising nature found in the cabin went with him.

An hour after the capture of the judge four horsemen rode away from the cabin.

The little troop was composed of the scout, his two boy avengers and the judge.

The latter was securely bound to his horse and was also gagged, so that he could not call for help to any one who might be met on the way on the lone trails of the hills.

The scout's pack-horse was loaded with things taken from the cabin.

"It will be a hard night's ride, boy pards, but we must make it. Then we'll take a good rest!" said the scout.

The ride was made; the fort was reached before breakfast, and the judge was taken at once before Colonel Ramsey and then accused of being the secret chief of the road-agents.

Ample proof was found among his effects to prove that he was guilty, and so, with Doc Driggs and Brassy, he was put in prison to await trial.

Trial meant a quick verdict of guilty, and sure sentence to the gallows for the murder of Hart, the Midnight Mail Rider, and for other murders.

Until they saw the men hanged, the Texan boys—Buffalo Bill's "team" as he was pleased to call them—remained in the settlement.

Then they took leave of their beloved chief and their many other friends and returned to their homes in the Lone Star State, where to-day they are both wealthy ranchmen, widely known and favorites with all true Texans. Harold Hart won for his wife the sister of his team mate, Leonard Ashley—his tried comrade on the trail to avenge a father's death.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 75) will contain "Buffalo Bill and the Black Mask; or, The Raffle of Death."

The Death Raffle was an exciting thing, for it meant death to the man who drew the unlucky number. How it was drawn and who by, and how the black mask was unmasked by Buffalo Bill, will be told in next week's issue.

CURIOUS DREAMS



The contest is humming along, boys. Entries are piling in.

Don't let yours be among the missing, but get in line with the boys who know what's what, and who are getting their entries in as speedily as possible.

Full particulars on page 31.

An Exciting Dream.

(By Gus. Reiman, Conn.)

One night as I was sleeping I dreamed of going out hunting. As I was going to the woods I saw a bear, and at about the same time the bear caught sight of me.

I raised my rifle and fired. The ball struck the bear in the back. He came after me, howling very loudly. I fired another shot, which killed the bear, with a bullet in his brain. Then I went home to get my father to help me skin the bear. We no sooner got near the dead bear than two other bears rushed out of the bushes.

My rifle was not loaded, for in my haste I forgot to load, so my father and I climbed up a tree.

The bears continued to stay under the tree as we loaded our rifles and fired, the bears howling as loud as they could and plunged into the bushes.

We no sooner got down from the tree than the bears came out again and we dropped as if we were dead and held our breath. The bears smelt us and sat down beside us, and then I got up and cocked my rifle and fired at one, which killed it. The other turned around and rushed at us, and we climbed the tree quickly.

He watched us and then walked away. I fired at the bear, but did not hit it. I fired once more and I hit the bear in the brain and killed it.

My father and I got down from the tree and we were going to skin the three bears when suddenly another bear came from behind some bushes and we climbed the tree for the third time and tried to catch hold of a limb, but I did not succeed.

I fired, but did not reach my mark, and I fired again. This shot hit the bear in the ear. It howled fiercely and came under the tree to try to catch hold of a limb, but again failed and the bear ran to the side of the other three dead bears and rolled them over to see if they were

hurt, but seeing that they were dead the bear began to howl so loud that it made my hair curl.

The bear sat on the ground and continued to howl furiously.

I fired my last shot, which disappointed me by not hitting the bear. The bear rushed at the tree and bumped against it, which nearly stunned the bear. The bear fell over, but got up quickly and again rushed at the tree. Catching a limb the bear caught my foot and pulled me down to the ground.

I was frightened terribly, but at that moment I awoke and looked around and did not see any bears, which disappointed me.

On the Tail of a Comet.

(By Robert Welty, Ohio.)

One cold December night I went upstairs, took a Buffalo Bill story from the desk and began to read.

A hot fire was in the stove near me, so I was quite comfortable. After I finished the story I began to feel sleepy. Suddenly I fell asleep and began to dream. I dreamed I was walking along the street when suddenly a man came out of an alley and hit me on the head with a club.

When I came to I was in the air. I tried to move, but couldn't. I wondered what was the matter, so I looked down. To my astonishment I could only see the atmosphere. I was on something hot; so hot it was that it burned the cords that held me down. I started to explore. Everything was red like fire. It burned my feet, but I walked on.

After a while I found out that I was on the tail of a comet, and that I was going at the rate of 2,000 miles a minute.

After a while it began to get dark, and I went to sleep. When I awoke the next morning I was still going, when

suddenly the tail flew up and hit me on the side of the head with such force as to knock me off the comet.

Off I went, falling to where I did not know. I did not fall far, for I landed on a man's head and knocked him unconscious.

"What yer doing?" said the man, as soon as he regained consciousness.

"I am not doing anything, at present," I answered.

He was the queerest man I ever saw, for he had four eyes, two heads, four arms and four legs. He was a regular giant, for he was over ten feet high and weighed over five hundred pounds.

"Where am I?" said I.

"You're on Venus, you idiot," he answered, gruffly.

He then started some peculiar signs over my head, when, to my astonishment, I put my hand up to my head I could feel two heads.

"Ha, ha! he, he! ho, ho!" laughed he, "you're my brother now; you and I look alike. You will have to stay here with me for a while and keep me company till the time comes for another sacrifice."

"What do you mean to do with me then?" I asked.

"You are condemned to die."

I then resolved to have some fun with him as long as I was going to die.

"Do you really mean it?"

"Yes, I do," he said, angrily.

"Let me tell you how I came to be here, will you?" I said.

"All right, but hurry up about it."

So I told him everything.

I was kept there about a week, having all the fun I wanted with him. At last he said:

"Prepare to die; I will give you an hour to say your prayers; then you get thrown into that fiery pit which you see yonder."

I gave myself up for lost, for to struggle against him was useless; so he picked me up as if I were a baby and was just going to throw me over the pit when, crack! something hit me on the jaw and I woke to find my mother standing over me. I was very thankful to find it was only a dream, so I took off my clothes and went to bed, and was up the next morning bright and early.

A Dream in Camp.

(By C. D. Malone, Ohio.)

Last summer, with two boy friends, I camped for a couple of weeks on the banks of the Scioto River.

We were sitting around the camp fire one chilly night telling stories. The last one told was of a boy's journey across the country to California. It was full of thrilling adventure and hairbreadth escapes.

A trip to California was one of my most cherished dreams.

After getting ready for our night's rest I rolled myself in my blanket and lay down on my bed of dried leaves and, closing my eyes, suddenly felt myself transported into space. A balloon was fast bearing me from the earth, far above into the blue heavens, till the earth was

but a mere speck in a sea of blue. Hearing a strange noise that caused me to cast my eyes upward, I found, to my horror, that the gas was escaping from the balloon. The flight was arrested until the balloon was almost motionless, and in another second I was shooting downward at the rate of two hundred miles per minute.

As I neared the earth I expected to be dashed to pieces, and to my great surprise I struck the ocean, and down I went into unfathomable depths, still keeping the two hundred-mile speed, going too fast to think, and deeper through another ocean, and out into space.

The force of the fall had taken me through the earth and out the other side, and shot into space again. Soon the force was spent, I found myself falling earthward again; a great crash sounded in my ears.

I awoke to find myself half buried in leaves, my bunk had broken and thrown me to the ground, burying me in leaves. I had taken a wonderful journey in the space of a few seconds.

A Dream of Robbers.

(By Jay Eckman, Pa.)

One night I went to bed and I thought I would not dream, but I did.

I dreamed that some robbers came in the house, and when they came into my room they saw me and took me away back into some big, deep hollow.

Then they said they were going to burn me at a stake and tied me, hand and foot to a stake which had been thrust in the ground. Some of them got some wood and threw it down at my feet. Next they poured a can of oil over the wood, and one robber struck a match and was about to set the oil on fire when I awoke.

That was as mysterious a dream as I ever had.

My Mother's Death.

(By Chas. T. Morse, R. I.)

Last New Year's evening, after a family gathering to watch the old year out and the new year in, my father, mother and I took our chairs and circled around the fire to warm our feet before going to bed.

We were very still on account of the late hour, but my mother broke the silence by saying:

"I may not be alive next New Year."

My father told her not to think of such a thing, and we then retired.

While I was undressing I thought of my mother's remark, but having heard it so often I did not mind it. When I retired I was restless and could not sleep.

I rolled around in the bed, first on my back, then on my sides, but I could not sleep.

I dressed myself, lit the gas in the parlor and read a story. I then retired again, and after rolling from side to side for an hour I fell into a light slumber.

While in this slumber I had a terrible dream. I awoke feeling weak and distressed. I did not know what had

happened to me. But as my senses came back to me I could see a picture which almost made me faint. I saw my mother stretched in her bed and she was dead. I had been dreaming of the same thing.

I could not sleep the remainder of the night, and at seven o'clock I arose and found that no one was up. This looked very strange, for my mother was in the habit of having breakfast ready at seven; so I went to her chamber to awaken her, but she did not respond to my calling. I opened the door and saw the same thing I saw in my dream. I did not know what to do, but I managed to call my father. When he came to the room he found that I had fainted. I awoke that evening and found myself in bed, attended by the family physician. He said my mother died from heart trouble.

A Horrible Dream.

(By Walter F. Akin, Cal.)

About two months ago I dreamed that a large star fell from the sky.

My brother and I went to find it and lost our way and lay down by a pond of water and went to sleep.

I dreamed that I went up in the sky and saw a man. He said everybody had a star, and it was a lamp. When all the oil burned out the person who owned the lamp died.

I looked at my lamp and saw it was almost burned out, but my brother's lamp burned beautifully. Not knowing what I was doing I poured some of the oil from his lamp into mine, and stirred it, and that mixed us together, and we both looked alike and could not be told apart.

Jess, my brother, murdered a man and they thought it was me, and hung me.

I was about dead when my lamp was knocked down and some oil spilled on the rope and burned it and freed me.

Once while pouring the oil from Jess' lamp I dreamed I awoke and was pouring water in my ear.

When I was free the alarm bell on the clock woke me up. I was so scared that I fainted, but when I recovered I had been asleep thirteen hours. I was badly scared, but am all right now.

My True Dream.

(By R. C. Skinner, R. I.)

What I am going to write about is what I dreamed December 20, 1900. I forget which day it was.

The day before I went skating and had such a nice time that I thought I would go skating the next day. After I had gone to sleep I started in to dream. I was dreaming about going skating and playing polo. I thought I won three goals in succession. I had started in to make another one when the boy I was playing with hit me over the shins with his hockey stick, and knocked my feet out from under me.

When I got on my feet he had made ten goals while I had only three. In the last part of the game I made seven more goals. Then suddenly my right foot went through

the ice. I struggled hard to get my foot out, and while struggling I suddenly awoke and found it all a dream. I thought a good deal about it and then went to sleep. The next day, at two o'clock in the afternoon I started for the skating pond. While there I received a challenge from a boy to play him a game of polo.

I accepted, and, strange as it may seem to you and the readers of Buffalo Bill, everything I dreamed came true. I never dreamed before and had the dream come true. This may seem like a fish story or fish dream, but it is true, all the same.

The Happy Dream.

(By C. J. Odell, Mass.)

Some time ago I came through a Western city, and at the railroad station my eyes fell upon a very pretty girl.

I admired her very much and at last thought, "I am going to win her." But still there was but little prospect for me of ever meeting her again, as I had then come about six hundred miles and had about a thousand miles more to the end of my trip.

I stopped off in different cities along the line, and most every night I dreamed that I was to meet that girl in Worcester, although I had my ticket for Boston, but to see if my dream would come true I stopped off at Worcester and I was taking in the city for a week, when at last I got tired. So one day I had the expressman take my baggage to the station and I was just going to purchase a ticket when I happened to see the same lady, and we are now a happy couple.

A Close Call.

(By Emmet Beall, Ohio.)

The dream is that I, in company with my father, were hunting in Yellowstone Park. Our guide was a good hunter and brave. He warned us not to become separated. We tramped for about a mile when he spied a deer. My father shot and in the excitement I became separated from them. I wandered around trying to track them again. In my eagerness I did not notice a pair of tigers until one growled in my rear. Turning I fired. The foremost fell, but his mate, growling fiercely, attacked me, before I could fire again. I thought I had received several wounds, and feeling weak from the loss of blood I tried to cry out, but could not.

In the nick of time there was a crack of a rifle and my father who had been attracted to the spot by my rifle crack came tearing through the bushes.

I let out a cry and awoke to find myself in bed.

Then I knew it was a dream.

Was not that a close call?



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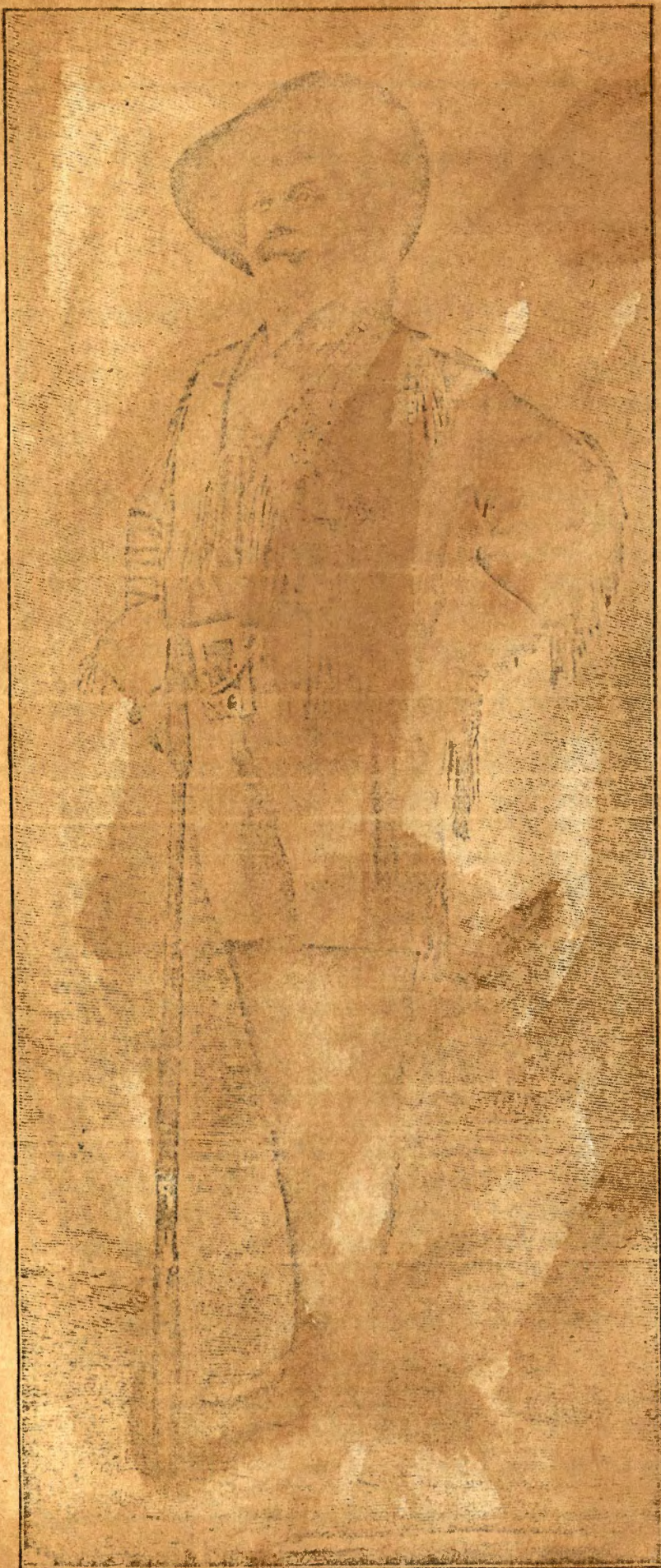
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